SAINT DISMAS
AND OTHER LEGENDS

A. H.

EDITED BY ENID DINNIS

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legends in verse

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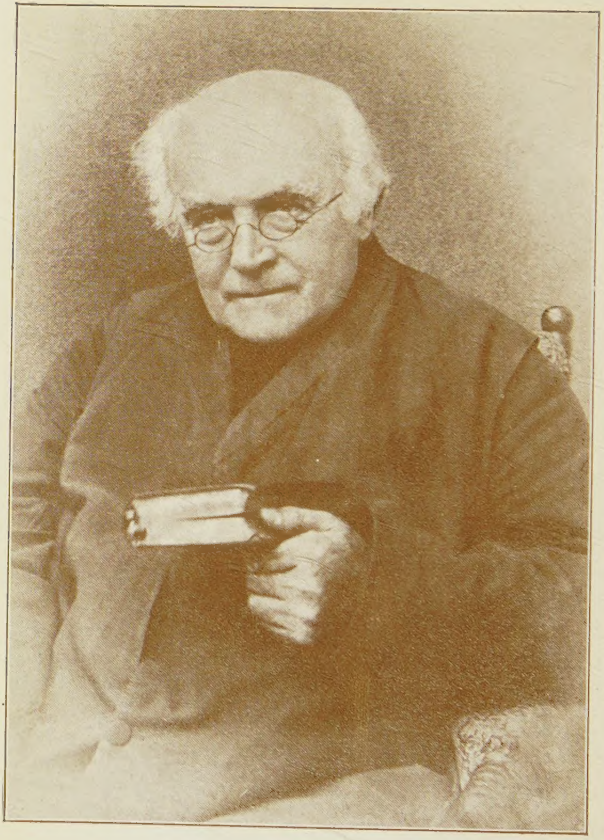
SAINT DISMAS AND OTHER LEGENDS IN VERSE



FATHER PETER GALLWEY, S.J.

The original sponsor of this little book.

(See page 10.)

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AND OTHER LEGENDS
IN VERSE
BY A. H.
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ENID DINNIS

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SAN RAFAEL

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INTRODUCTION

HE reader whose memory goes back a generation may recognize (the editor feels certain, with pleasure) the contents of the present little volume. The story of their first appearance is so characteristic of their first editor, Father Peter Gallwey, S.J., that it is worthy of recording on that account alone. The stories embodied in the poems were favourites with Father Gallwey, who delighted in a story for the pointing of a moral. He happened on an idea—the present generation would call it a brain-wave—that they would lend themselves to effective treatment in verse and add to their utility in that form. It was characteristic of the famous Jesuit that what he wanted done he contrived to get done. With a view, as he put it, "to providing Gospel truths and high thoughts with a graceful dress," he proceeded to commandeer the services of a member of his flock whom he shrewdly suspected of hiding a poetic light behind a bushel. The latter, all unaware of the Father's ultimate intention, not only provided the graceful dress but embellished the noble stories with many noble thoughts. The poems displayed an artistry which would have held its own had there been no moral to point.

Without apprising the poetess of his intention Father Gallwey, still acting characteristically, had the poems printed—in a series of penny pamphlets, to which he gave the egregious and unforgivable title of "Churchyard Flowers, or Memories of the Holy Dead," and their author had the unique experience of unwittingly purchasing a copy of her own work effectively disguised under a title which had by no means inspired her with a desire to investigate the contents !

Father Gallwey was forgiven, however, and the "Churchyard Flowers" were supplemented by others for which the authoress herself suggested the themes.

Later on the poems were collected and published in book form, the misleading title alone preventing a wider circulation of a volume which, in spite of its titular disability, ran into several editions.

It has been felt that after a quarter of a century, in spite of the change in poetic modes and methods, the little volume may well venture to go forth on the mission described by Father Gallwey in his Preface, which latter, if it reflects in its terminology the date at which it was written, treats of an achievement which has not suffered from change of fashion inasmuch as the themes dealt with are stories of the ever-present. Narrative verse, moreover, is an art to which attention is being turned again in our own day. The mood which would regard

it as out of date is fast passing. The ballad-maker is a figure which may not be permanently obliterated. The art of telling a story in verse is a far rarer one than is imagined. The author of the present collection, it will be agreed, possesses it in a high degree. She has chosen to remain anonymous, and delighted as one would be to give her secret away, one is fain to admit that it would " spoil the story."

Under a new and less hampering title it is hoped that the memories of the holy dead enshrined in the following pages may bloom a second time and shed their sweetness in many directions, not the less so because they contain a memory of one now to be included among the holy dead—Father Peter Gallwey, whose Preface to the first edition is reprinted with the present one as an intrinsic part of the little poesy of " Gospel truths and high thoughts."

ENID M. DINNIS.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

By PETER GALLWEY, S.J.

ONE of the penitential exercises of our school days was to study Ovid's *Tristia*. We all agreed with the author that the title was appropriate. We thought it a most lugubrious and dismal book. I still remember the first two lines, which he wrote because he himself had been banished from Rome and was forbidden to return—

> Parve, nec invideo sine me liber ibis in urbem,
> Hei mihi ! quo Domino non licet ite tuo.

The sense of these lines, or something approaching it, may be gathered from the following couplets—

> My little book, you're going to the city !
> Your master cannot go. Alas ! the pity !
> I don't begrudge your happy happy fate,
> But mourn that I must stay outside the gate.

Books often go where their authors cannot have access. This is specially true of good books. They sometimes find their way to houses into which neither priest nor sister of charity can penetrate. Hence the importance

of counteracting the terrible influence of bad books by multiplying and spreading books that may attract souls to truth and holiness. We have the Apostleship of Prayer. So too surely is there in the Church an Apostleship of Good Books. Like the seventy-two disciples sent by our Lord, they often go "before the face of the Lord into every city and place whither He is about to come." (St. Luke x. 1.)

Moreover, he who writes a good book in such a style as will be attractive, has done a good work that will live after him, and will not be "interred with his bones." And as we are all exhorted to seek the greater glory of God, and to aim at the salvation of many souls, it is evident that devoting time and labour to the composition of such books is an excellent kind of almsgiving.

It is equally evident that almsgiving to pay the printing of such good books, or to help the spread of such books, must be a work of mercy at which no one can cavil. Some who have the substance of this world deny themselves the happiness of sharing it, because, so they say, they are afraid of being imposed upon. There is no fear of imposture when alms are given to promote the circulation of good and attractive books.

The little volume now sent abroad on its mission is, I may safely say, a good book and an attractive book. Gospel truths and high thoughts are presented in a very graceful dress.

Many who have read the pieces which make up this volume, when they appeared separately, have found them to be as effective as an eloquent sermon.

In family life the evenings sometimes pass heavily enough for want of some wholesome entertainment; and sometimes zealous missionaries are anxious to provide a mental treat for their flocks, and, perhaps too, to collect a little money for some good object by interesting penny readings.

School managers, also, are at times glad to have something to read to the children that shall be at once innocent and attractive. This little volume will afford any good reader most useful occupation, and enable him also not only to entertain an audience, but to send them away much wiser, and with their minds full of holy and happy thoughts.

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I

A LEGEND OF SAINT DISMAS

THE tranquil night had sunk o'er Nazareth
When Mary and St. Joseph left their home
And fled across the lonely wilderness,
Seeking a refuge for the God made Man.
No time for preparations had been giv'n,
Nor needed—Poverty has none to make.
" Arise," the Angel said, and Joseph rose,
And calling Mary told her God's command
That they should up and fly. No word she spoke,
But took her sleeping Treasure in her arms
And went with Him out in the starlight cold,
To face the desert with its nameless fears.
Thrice on their path had come the day and night
Since they had left their peaceful cottage home.
The cold of midnight and the burning heat
Of noonday sun in silence meek they bore,
Cheered ever by the presence of the Babe
Whose heavenly smile shed light on all their way.

One night they sheltered in a robber's cave,
And found within the outlaw's rugged home
A kindly welcome from the outlaw's wife.
Perchance, poor soul, much sorrow made her kind,
And she was moved to pity at the sight
Of that young tender Mother and her Child—
Their beauty might have touched a harder heart
Than that which beat in this poor lawless breast—
Perchance some angel's whisper bade her see

In these poor strangers, humble though they seemed,
The stamp of more than earthly royalty.
She bade them welcome with rude courtesy,
And set before them all her homely fare—
Sweet milk and honey of the desert bee,—
The which she pressed on them with simple grace.
And while she served them, wond'ringly she gazed
Upon the peerless beauty of the Child ;
Mingling her ministrations with deep sighs.
His childish loveliness had filled her heart
With blameless envy, waking all her grief.
For she too had one child, a babe whose age
Neared that of Him the Virgin Mother bore.
But ah, not fair like Him ! A mother's eye
Alone could bear the sight of his poor face ;
A mother's heart alone had room for love
For such as he. While other mothers showed
Their treasured darlings, proud of each small grace
Or baby beauty, she alas ! must hide
The treasure of her heart from sight of all,
The very sun of heaven might not shine
Upon a leper's brow, and such he was,
Her little Dismas whom she loved the more
That he was so afflicted.
Supper done,
She brought a bath to wash the Stranger Child ;
And Mary, while she gently thanked her, saw
More than one tear into the water drop.

Touched to the heart, she asked : " Why weepest
thou ? "
And lo ! the mother of the leper child
Looked at the Mother of the Child most fair—
Most beautiful among the sons of men !
And in that face saw naught but tenderness
And deep compassion for her untold grief.

She spoke no word, but slowly crossed the room
To that dark corner where safe out of sight
The little leper all unconscious lay,
And brought the sleeping child to Mary's side,
Showing her sadly its disfigurement.
And Mary !—Ah, mayhap there woke in her
E'en then the universal motherhood
She was one day to bear for lepers worse
Than little Dismas—shrank not from his touch,
And won his mother's heart by kissing him.
Then gently said : " Poor mother, weep no more,
Thou soon shalt have no cause ! go wash thy boy
In that sweet water which but now hath bathed
The limbs of my fair Child." With simple faith
The mother took her boy and mute obeyed.
And lo ! he came forth fair, with flesh renewed,
Spotless and beautiful, his hot blood cooled,
His eyes as clear and limpid as a stream.
No happier mother in the world could show
A fairer babe, except indeed that One
Whom she to-night had tended, and Who thus
Rewarded her beyond her wildest hopes.

* * *

Amid the mystic gloom on Calvary's hill

The two babes, grown to manhood, met once more.
The robber and the Saviour side by side,
And both condemned to die the self-same death.

Ah, Dismas ! thy first leprosy was fair
To that which now disfigures thy poor soul.
No water from His bath will cleanse thee now,
His Blood alone hath power to make thee whole.
But there's no lack of that ! Its tide might cleanse
A thousand worlds in one blood-crimson bath.
With godlike prodigality it pours
In such strong streams that even crimes like thine
Are borne away in its resistless flood.
Look round, poor Dismas, meet those wistful eyes,
Expressing His Heart's wish that thou wouldst ask
The pardon He is longing to bestow !
And Dismas looked, and saw amid the gloom
That Face so pale and patient, showing white
Against the darkened sky, while tears and blood
Stream down it, marring all its loveliness.
He heard the Voice that ravishes high Heav'n
Reply to scoff and jeer and blasphemy
By that sublime and everlasting prayer :
" Father, forgive, they know not what they do ! "
Forgive ! yea, Dismas, pardon e'en for them
Who drove those cruel nails ; why not for thee ?
And Dismas heard and saw and he believed.

His poor dead mother's simple trusting faith,
Which three-and-thirty years ago had won
Him health within the cave, now woke in him.
Below in silent joy 'mid all her grief
His new-made Mother stood, and watched and prayed
For this the first of that long line of sons
Begotten in her woe on Calvary—
The first she sent before her into Heaven
Red with His Blood, forgiven and redeemed.
He heard the other robber's blasphemy :
" If Thou be Christ, then save Thyself and us ! "
And strong in his new faith, and with the spell
Of those pathetic Eyes upon him still
Changing his heart, he said in strong rebuke :
" Nay, thou and I have well deserved to die,
Not so this Man, no evil hath He done."
Then turning to the silent Sufferer
Beside him, humbly prayed : " When Thou shalt come
Unto Thy Kingdom, Lord, remember me."
No more than this ! Ah, Dismas little knew
The height and depth and breadth of that great Heart
To which he thus appealed. Back swiftly came
The answer from the dying lips of God :
" This day, My Dismas, shalt thou dwell with Me
In Paradise." Ah, happy sinner ! Thus
Was well repaid the hospitality
Thy mother showed to His so long ago.
An everlasting welcome into Heav'n
For that one night's rude welcome in the cave.

II

THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE

THE snow lay deep on vale and hill,
The ice had frozen stream and rill
Beneath Armenia's sky :
The deep blue lake now cold and white,
Ice-bound beneath the moonbeams bright ;
How still its waters lie !

Breast high in ice that froze their blood,
Against the midnight sky they stood
Those forty soldiers brave.
Shiv'ring with cold, but not with fear,
They looked without a moan or tear
Upon their awful grave.

Their naked limbs already worn
By nights of pain, and cruelly torn
By rack and gyve and chain
And iron hook, are now laid bare
To cold north winds, so bitter there,
Opening their wounds again.

Beside the lake lay in their reach
A bath in readiness for each
To end their agony.
A plunge therein meant faith denied
And Him renounced Who willing died
For them upon the Tree.

And blazing in their tortured sight
Those tempting fires shone clear and bright
Loud crackling in the air ;

But louder with their dying breath
The martyrs in the throes of death
Poured forth a burning prayer :

"Lord, hear Thy servants cry
From out this lake
Wherein ice-bound we lie
For Thy dear sake.
Forty soldiers we,
Let us forty be
When we shall stand before Thy great white throne ;
Bid Thine angels weave
Forty crowns, nor leave
A single crown unwoven, no, not one,
Crown forty brows before Thy great white throne."

The whole night long the martyrs prayed,
Their pains increased, but undismayed
Still rang their voices sweet :
"Let us, O Lord, still forty be
When we shall stand in front of Thee
Before Thy judgment-seat.

"Let not Thy servants vainly cry
Who here in frozen waters lie
So willingly for Thee."
Nor to the throne of God in vain
Was borne that night the strange refrain,
"Oh let us forty be."

God granted them the boon they sought,
Though not in quite the way they thought
When they began to pray.
One, only one there was among
That company who basely flung
His peerless crown away.

The cold he could no longer bear,
The martyr's crown he would not wear,
Alas, so near at hand !
He left his sorrowing comrades' side
To seek the bath—woe, woe betide !
One plunge he took therein and died
In sight of all the band.

* * *

A pagan guard stood wondering nigh
And watched the martyrs slowly die,
Marking the smile of ecstasy
Their wasted features wore.
He heard their strange and earnest prayer
Ring out upon the frozen air
And marvelled more and more.

He saw the coward when he fled
Seeking relief, find death instead
And shuddered at the sight.
And when amid the twilight dim
Bright angel bands appeared to him
His soul was filled with light.

" Was Heaven then so near ? Could he
Like those brave youths a martyr be ?
With short-lived pain to buy

One of those crowns the angels bore —
He ne'er had seen such crowns before —
Yes ! he would gladly die."

Then woke within his pagan heart
An earnest longing to have part
In brotherhood so blest :
" Be mine the forfeit crown," he cried ;
Then stript himself the lake beside,
And leaping in the frozen tide
The Christian faith professed.

* * *

Long were the night hours, but at last
When morning dawned and sunbeams cast
Their light upon the land,
The martyrs stood in endless joy
Before their God, except one boy,
The youngest of the band.

The pagan guards who came to take
The lifeless bodies from the lake
Into the fire to cast,
Forbore to take him with the rest
In hopes that now if duly pressed
The faith he had so long confessed
He would deny at last.

But lo ! his mother stood beside
Watching his martyrdom with pride ;
Unmoved, like her who stood
Beside the Cross so silently,
And saw her Son in agony
For sinners shed His Blood.

" Go, go, my boy," she cried, and pressed
His frozen body to her breast
Where joy had stifled pain.
" The God Who gave thee to my heart
Now calls thee back, now bids us part,
But we shall meet again.

" Son of my heart, my widowed years
In thy bright presence knew no tears,
Thou wert my joy and stay ;
But never to thy mother's heart
Didst thou such radiant joy impart
As that it knows to-day.

" Go quickly, boy, and overtake
Thy brave companions of the lake
Who've all gone on before.
Lag not behind one moment's space,
To stand with them before His Face
Upon the eternal shore."

And running with that precious weight,
All fearful lest he should be late,
Upon the bloody bier
She laid him down with tender care
Beside his dear dead comrades there,
Nor shed a single tear.

One holy parting kiss she pressed
On his young brow where soon should rest
The crown that martyrs wear ;

The dews of death were on it now,
And three long nights of pain, I trow,
Had quenched youth's radiance there.

But never in days of happiness
Did those fond lips so proudly press
Her darling's brow in fond caress ;
Or that true heart with joy
Beat higher, hearing praise or fame
Combined with that beloved name
By which she knew her boy.

The cart moved on, she watched it go,
But still her tears refused to flow
Though all alone on earth.
She smiled and whispered : " Happy boy,
And happy mother ! oh, what joy,
To give a martyr birth ! "

* * *

And now their agony is o'er
And crowned upon the Eternal Shore
The forty martyrs stand.
Not one is missing there, not one,
And Jesus smiles, and says : " Well done,
My dear, My gallant band."

III

KYRIE ELEISON

PART I

THROUGH the church-door streamed the light —
Kyrie eleison !
From a hundred tapers bright,—
Christe eleison !
Rang the choristers' voices sweet
On the dark and silent street
Making music in the night.

Came an officer along—
Kyrie eleison !
Saw the light and heard the song,—
Christe eleison !
Stayed his footsteps at the door,
Clanked his sword upon the floor
As he knelt among the throng.

Boldest 'mid the bold and free—
Kyrie eleison !
Eustace seldom bent his knee—
Christe eleison !
At an altar, nor had prayed
Since his first Communion made
Years ago in La Vendée.

Like a sweet and soothing dream—
Kyrie eleison !
Of his childhood did it seem —
Christe eleison !
There to kneel among the crowd,
Low in adoration bowed,
While his thoughts with memories teem.

Now he sees his mother's face,—
Kyrie eleison !
Feels again her soft embrace —
Christe eleison !
And he seems, as oft of yore,
By her side to kneel once more
In the old accustomed place.

And the prayers that she had taught—
Kyrie eleison !
Long forgotten, now were brought—
Christe eleison !
To his memory again
In the Litany's soft strain ;
And an all unwonted pain
Came with each returning thought.

All the while the choir sings sweet—
Kyrie eleison !
And the worshippers repeat —
Christe eleison !
Low he bends, and still more low,
Hiding tears that overflow
On the pavement at his feet.

* * *

Now the tapers no more gleamed, —
Kyrie eleison !
Through the door the people streamed,—
Christe eleison !
But he stirs not, never knowing
Of their coming or their going ;
Of his childhood still he dreamed.

The last lingerer is gone :—
Kyrie eleison !
Barred the doors are every one : —
Christe eleison !
Deep, more deep, the darkness grows ;
Eustace nothing heeds, nor knows
How he's kneeling there alone.

Hark ! the clocks from dome and tower—
Kyrie eleison !
Booming, tell the midnight hour,—
Christe eleison !
At the last slow solemn toll,
Lo ! a priest in funeral stole
Glided through the vestry door.

Hollow-eyed that priest and pale !—
Kyrie eleison !
As he reached the altar-rail—
Christe eleison !
Stern he turned his eye and slowly
There where Eustace, bending lowly,
Shivered in his coat of mail.

For he sees with dread dismay —
Kyrie eleison !
In those features cold and grey –
Christe eleison !
One upon whose lonely grave
He had seen the cypress wave
Near the church in La Vendée.

One beside whose knee he prayed,—
Kyrie eleison !
And his first confession made : —
Christe eleison !
One whose hands the Bread of Heaven
Had to him the first time given,
Ere from innocence he strayed.

Heavily upon his ear—
Kyrie eleison !
Fell that dead priest's voice austere—
Christe eleison !
And a ghastly terror shook him,
Till his senses nigh forsook him
Those remembered tones to hear.

Said the priest : " Unhappy one —
Kyrie eleison !
Thy mad course on earth is run —
Christe eleison !
Let the solemn death-bell toll ;
God have mercy on thy soul ;
Thou shalt see no morrow's sun."

Brave was Eustace, very brave,—
Kyrie eleison !
He had faced a soldier's grave —
Christe eleison !
Dauntless in the charge—but now
Broke the cold sweat on his brow —
Loud he shrieked : " Oh ! Mary, save ;

" By the tears that thou hast shed—
Kyrie eleison !
By thy Son's Blood, streaming red—
Christe eleison !
Mercy, Mother, give me time,
To repent a life of crime,
Ere I'm numbered with the dead."

O when did prayer from guilt or pain—
Kyrie eleison !
Mount to Mary's ears in vain ?—
Christe eleison !
Quick in answer to his cry,
Whispered comes the soft reply :
" Eustace may on earth remain

" One year longer ; God's decree—
Kyrie eleison !
Is reversed for love of me ;—
Christe eleison !
For that piercing cry of thine
Reached this loving heart of mine,
Which has yearned to succour thee.

" Child of mercy ! wisely spend—
Kyrie eleison !
Time that God vouchsafes to lend ; —
Christe eleison !
Brief, brief respite to prepare
By repentance and by prayer,
For thy quickly coming end."

Oh, how gladly Eustace swore—
Kyrie eleison !
That he would transgress no more ;
Christe eleison !
Not a moment would he waste ;
When the day dawned he would haste,
Years of folly to deplore.

PART II

'Tis a gay and festive scene ;
Youths and maids of gladsome mien,—
Miserere Domine !
Merry voices, laughter ringing,
Lightest dancing, sweetest singing,
Never a thought of death I ween.

Gayest of the giddy throng,
Loudest in the laugh and song—
Miserere Domine !
Sits young Eustace, all unheeding
Of the time so quickly speeding
Towards the grave he'll fill ere long.

Has he then forgot his doom ?
How between him and the tomb—
Miserere Domine !
Short, how short the time is now !
Certes, on his careless brow
No death shadow seems to loom.

Friends, alas ! false friends betray :
Soft persuasion leads astray.
Miserere Domine !
Straight, when closed that night of fear,
To his friends and comrades dear
He had hied farewell to say ;

But they laughed out long and loud :
" Well may'st thou become thy shroud ! "
Miserere Domine !
" Twelve months hence ! What ! will no less
Time suffice thee to confess,
And to make thy peace with God ?

" Sinful monster thou must be !
Half twelve months would do for me."
Miserere Domine !
" Nay, one month, one week, one day !
Would that I could surely say
I one other day shall see."

" Come let ten months more be thine,
Still to quaff the red, red wine " —
Miserere Domine !
" Still to laugh with us together,
In the golden summer weather,
To make merry, dance, and dine."

They prevailed. The ten months passed :
Quick they flew from first to last.
Miserere Domine !

Then : " Oh ! one month more ! " they cried ;
" One short month ! " nor were denied.
Alas ! that time should fly so fast.

" One month still !—you cannot go :
There's the ball ! the race ! the show ! "—
Miserere Domine !
" All next week. What need for fears ?
Time enough for contrite tears
Two or three weeks hence to flow."

Thus he wavered, lingered on
Till the weeks went one by one—
Miserere Domine !
Till but days, short days, remained,
Till the last but one had waned.
" God," he cries, " I am undone."

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PART III

All alone within his room,
One short hour before his doom—
Parce nobis Domine !
Wild eyes fixed upon his watch,
Ears erect each sound to catch,
Waits he one who does not come.

Twice that day o'er hill and plain
Fast his servants rode in vain—
Parce nobis Domine !
For the priest ; no priest was there ;
He was absent ; none knew where—
Nor might soon return again.

Once again at his behest,
Rode they forth north, east, and west—
Parce nobis Domine !
And he waits for their returning,
Heart and brain in fever burning ;
Still no messenger, no priest !

Beats his heart, and burns his brow,
It is nearing midnight now—
Parce nobis Domine !
Minutes only now remain,
In despair and deathly strain
See, he counts them as they go.

Hark ! the baying of his hound !
Hark ! the night wind's moaning sound ! —
Parce nobis Domine !
Hark ! the grey owl's piercing call !
But, ah me ! no horse hoof's fall
Outside on the gravelled ground.

Tick, tick, tick, the hour draws near ;
Tick, tick, tick, the hour is here—
Parce nobis Domine !
Strikes the clock ! like passing bell,
Every tone his own death-knell—
Clear, distinct, and awful fell
One by one upon his ear.

Ere the last condemning stroke
Sunk to silence—Eustace woke—
Parce nobis Domine !

From his agonizing dream.
Still the hundred tapers gleam,
Still the Litany's sweet theme
On his ear in rapture broke.

"Praised be God!" he cried aloud;—
Kyrie eleison!
Heedless of the kneeling crowd,—
Christe eleison!
"Praised be God, and praised be thou,
Mother, that I lie not now—
Doomed in my unhallowed shroud."

Then while priest and choir still sing—
Kyrie eleison!
And the clear responses ring,
Christe eleison!
"If the dream alone," thinks he,
"Be so awful, what must be
The untold reality
Outcast from my God, my King?"

* * *

Changed was Eustace from that hour,—
Kyrie eleison!
Worldly joys no more had power
Christe eleison!
O'er his heart, to God now given;
Now he hopes to wake in Heaven
When life's fitful dream is o'er.

IV

JUDGE NOT

THE monk's young life was ebbing fast.
His laboured breathing could not last
Much longer now. In gown and hood
Around his bed the brethren stood,
Watching with awe and silent fear
The solemn hour of death draw near.
Nor awe nor fear seemed traced upon
The calm white brow of Brother John.
No ghosts of past transgressions dread
Seemed now to haunt his dying bed ;
At which the monks in sad surprise
Slow shook their heads and raised their eyes.
They better would have liked, I ween,
To see him with less smiling mien
Await his call ; for, truth to tell,
His life had not been spent as well
As they could wish. The Abbot knew
That never far between nor few
Had been his faults, nor could he see
Much indicating sanctity
In all the twenty years and one
Of poor misguided Brother John.
And many memories sadly stirred
Each brother's breast of bells unheard
By Brother John, of rules not quite
As well observed as good rules might,
Of truant feet that well-a-day !
Though prompt enough at hours of play,
When called to work were wont to lag,
And of a tongue that used to wag

In silence time. 'Twas quiet now ;
But its vibrations were not slow
In days of old. Nor was there one
Who could not tell how Brother John
Had loved, " not wisely but too well,"
His morning pillow. When the bell
For Matins rang and all should be
At choir in church—ah, where was he ?
While thus their secret thoughts ran on
No whit disturbed was Brother John.
He lay there smiling and serene,
As calm as if his life had been
Righteous and holy. Passing strange !
They thought, that death's approach no change
Brought in that calm and wasted face,
Which smiled with just such heav'nly grace
As might have lit the features faint
Of some ecstatic dying saint.

The Abbot bent his hoary head
In silent doubt, then sadly said :
" Hast thou no cause for late remorse
In all thy unreligious course ?
What saints scarce meet without a fear
Canst thou see heedlessly draw near ?
Dost think thyself then fit for Heav'n ? "
" I trust my sins are all forgiv'n,"
Said Brother John in gentle voice :
" No cause have I save to rejoice."
The startled Abbot ill disguised
How grieved he was and scandalized.

While all the brethren inly groaned
With hands uplifted, while they moaned :
" Alas ! not e'en one contrite tear
O'er his past life ! —and death so near ! "
But Brother John, unmoved the while,
In peace secure could only smile,
And say : " Grieve not, my brothers dear !
Each moment Heaven draweth near.
No model monk, I know, am I,
But still I tremble not to die ;
For I have seen in vision fair
What now to tell I scarcely dare.
I saw the Judgment-seat ; I saw
The book of doom. With trembling awe,
With fearful heart I stood alone
Before the great white empty throne.
And as I waited shivering there
Came soon an angel passing fair ;
But ah ! a look so stern he wore
It pierced me through and through. He bore
A scroll on which in words of flame
I read my miserable name.
While facing me in crimson glow,
My sins were catalogued below.
Each thought, each word, each action wrong —
Scarce need I say the scroll was long
Ah, brethren, 'tis a fearful sight,
The sight of sin in Heav'nly light !
One moment hope within me died,
But quick revived ; aloud I cried :
' Dear angel, sinner though I be
In sight of God, and man, and thee,

Yet hear me once ere I'm condemned !
My sinful life nought may defend ;
I guilty plead, come woe or weal,
To all there writ ; but I appeal ! '
' Appeal ! ' the angel said ; ' to whom ? '
' To Him Who saved from endless doom
The dying thief, the woman ta'en
In sin of blackest foulest stain,
The Magdalene who loved so much,
The publican, and thousands such.'
At this the angel's radiant brow
Relaxed—so stern and sad till now—
He almost smiled : ' Thou pleadest fair,'
He said : ' I can no answer dare.
For far beyond an angel's ken
God's mercy unto sinful men !
But '—here his brow grew dark again—
' Sin must be cleansed by bitter pain.
His mercy, true, doth overreach
His justice often, and beseech
His outraged Godhead to relent
And mitigate sin's punishment,
But some excuse it sure must show,
However small, for pleading so.
Now what hast thou with which to meet
The face of God at Judgment-seat ? '

" ' Dear angel, one poor plea alone
I dare to bring to that dread throne.
" Judge not," He said : " Judge not, and thou
Shalt not be judged." Ah ! angel, now,

Must I of Judgment still have fear ?
For never since I entered here
Have I my brothers judged, although
Not seldom bitter tears did flow
At treatment harsh. Deserved, I know,
Were oft the taunt, the sneer, the blow ;
But often too when innocent,
I meekly bore the punishment,
And every injury forgot,
Rememb'ring still His words : " Judge not."
And now with all my sins I stand
Before His throne with one demand,
That by the Cross on which He died
Those blessed words be verified :
" Judge not, and verily I say
Thou shalt not fear the Judgment day." '

" The angel stayed to hear no more,
But into fragments quickly tore
The fatal scroll my sins that bore.
And therefore go I to my Lord
With joyful trust in His sure word."

* * *

The last faint words were scarcely said
Ere happy Brother John was dead,
The Abbot 'mid his tears and sighs
Looked in the blue uplifted eyes,
But answering look came none.

Softly again, and yet again,
He called his name—but all in vain.

Within the silent chamber dim
The monks' low sobbing answered him,
But never Brother John.

Then bowed he low his snow-white head
In reverence for the peaceful dead
To joy eternal gone.

While each remorseful bosom there
Sobbed forth to Heav'n an earnest prayer
For pardon, and for grace to share
The bliss of Brother John.

And as each monk his sin confest,
And sorrowing struck his contrite breast,
Came ever and anon

A sweet low voice, repeating still,
Like echo from a distant hill,
" Judge not, forgive ; forgive, judge not,
And your sins too will be forgot
Like those of Brother John."

V

A LEGEND OF THE ROSARY

SWEET were the woods with fragrant flowers
Through which young Aidan roamed at hours
When school was done, and task forgot,
In search of rare forget-me-not,
Of primrose pale, of harebell blue,
Of daffodil of golden hue,
And of the shy wood-violet sweet
Whose mossy sheltered safe retreat
So few can find, of ladies' smock
Whose shady nook beneath the rock
Could not from him long hidden be,
And of the wild anemone.
On mountain-side, in garden bower,
In field or grove, no leaf, no flower
Which Aidan's eye judged fit and fair
Was long by him left lingering there.
All, all were culled that he might twine
A garland for our Lady's shrine.
For after school was done each day,
While other boys ran off to play,
Unmindful of the merry band
He hastened with his flowers in hand,
To deck the statue of his Queen
Which stood upon the village green ;
To bare his head and say a prayer
And lay his flowery offering there.
This daily act of filial love
His Angel registered above,

And Mary with maternal joy
Smiled on the labours of the boy,
And showed her Son how bright her shrine
Shone with sweet May and eglantine,
How roses red around it set
Vied with the pink and violet
To grace their Queen. No word spoke she ;
She only pointed silently ;
And Jesus looked, and He too smiled
Upon the labours of the child.
Few flowers on earth to Him more fair
Than were those wreaths of wild flowers there,
In honour of His Mother brought.
Then turned to her : " Thou askest nought,
But I thy wish anticipate.
Great his reward, exceeding great.
This boy I to Myself will take
From this time forth and I will make
Him all My own." O, love profound
Of God's great Heart, what thought can sound
Thy mighty depths, what tongue can praise
The wonders of Thy lavish ways ?
A cup of water in Thy Name
An everlasting crown may claim.
A few poor flowers that quickly fade,
A daily thought, a short prayer said,
And this is his reward, to be
Among the host that follow Thee
In dazzling garments white as snow
Whithersoever Thou shalt go.

* * *

The years flew by : young Aidan's brow
The monk's brown cowl is shading now,
A owly cell, a pallet bed
Are his. Cold water, herbs and bread
Make up his daily frugal fare,
Sweetened by labour and by prayer.

One sole regret is his ! No more
Can he bring bouquets as of yore
To grace the statue of his Queen.
On that rude mountain-side is seen
No blossom. Scarce by daily toil
The monks can force the barren soil
To yield the simple herbs and few
Which for their scanty meals they grew.
This forced neglect oft made him sad.
One statue in his cell he had
Of his beloved Queen, and there
He often breathed a fervent prayer,
Wishing the while he still could bring
To her his boyish offering
Of every bloom that grove or field,
Or glen, or garden bed could yield,
Oh for a rose, or lily white,
A snowdrop pure, or jonquil bright,
Or primrose pale, or violet sweet,
To lay at his dear Mother's feet !

One night he rose at midnight hour
To pray before the Golden Door,
And by the flickering lamplight's gleam—
Was it a vision or a dream ?—

He saw a form whose lovely face
Shed radiance round the holy place.
" My son," she said—O ! who can tell
His bliss when those sweet accents fell
Upon his ear —" it grieveth thee
That thou canst bring no flowers to me,
But I have come to tell thee where
Thou mayest find blossoms far more fair
And dear to me than those, my child,
Thou broughtest from the woodland wild
Around thy home, for those were flowers
That faded with the passing hours.

" Though every leaf my Son did make
Is fair to me for His dear sake ;
Though humblest bud and veriest weed
Enchanting thoughts of Him can breed,
Yet more than lily, pink, or rose,
I love a flower of earth that grows
Within no garden, field, or glen,
But blossoms in the hearts of men.
When from the Angel's lips there fell
That first sweet *Ave* to foretell
My coming joy —'twas in that hour
First budded forth that mystic flower.
' Hail full of grace,' he greeted me :
' The Lord, O Mary, is with thee ! '
And then, my *Fiat* said, I felt
The God made Man within me dwelt.

" What marvel prayer so linked with this
First taste of my maternal bliss

Should be so dear ! When *Aves* swell
From humble home, from convent cell,
From hut or palace, shrine or fane,
I live that blissful hour again.
And those Hail Marys daily sung
In every land, in every tongue,
Are flowers with which my children weave
The fairest garlands I receive.
Then twine that lovely wreath for me,
The garland of the Rosary.
Each bead of that beloved prayer
A blossom is of beauty rare,
Whose wafted perfume constantly,
Like fragrant incense, gladdens me.
Ah, would that men might know the power
Of this, my dearest favourite flower."
The dream was ended. She was gone,
And Aidan was once more alone.

The morning dawned upon his prayer
And found him still in rapture there,
Still echoing through his ravished brain
Those piercing tones, that sweet refrain :
" Then twine that lovely wreath for me,
The garland of the Rosary."

* * *

The years flew by. On Aidan's brow
The lines of age are deepening now,
His step grows slower day by day,
His once dark hair is streaked with grey.

Late is the hour and lone the place,
When through the starless forest's gloom
Two monks their morning path retrace.
Like columns dark the pine trees loom
Casting their lengthening shadows dim.
One lonely bird the stillness broke
With his pathetic evening hymn,
Which not an answering echo woke
From distant bough or neighbouring nest,
For all but him had sunk to rest.

* * *

Darker it grew ; the night was near,
But Aidan's spirit knew no fear.
" Brother," he said, " 'tis late, but we
Must not forget our Rosary."
No day had passed, no single day,
That Aidan had forgot to lay
This sacred wreath at Mary's shrine
Since he had seen her face divine.
There in the twilight 'neath the trees
Quickly they fell upon their knees.
Nor knew they in that silent wood
Two armed brigands near them stood
And watched them, as in prayer they bent,
With evil hearts and foul intent.

Ave Maria, softly prayed
The kneeling monks. With naked blade
And stealthy step the robbers twain
Steal up behind. Oh, not in vain

Were those beseeching *Aves* said.
Back, back the outlaws fell in dread.
For lo ! a vision to their eyes
Unfolds beneath the starless skies.

Fearful they crouch behind the trees
With pallid face and trembling knees.
For there amid the darkening night
The monks were kneeling wrapt in light
So radiant that the robbers' gaze
Could not endure the dazzling blaze,
And from their praying lips there fell
Such roses as in bower or dell
Had never blossomed. Angels fair,
With wings that silvered all the air,
The falling shower of blossoms caught,
And into fragrant garlands wrought ;
Then offered them with looks of love
To one who sat enthroned above
On clouds aglow ; of every hue
Of gold, of purple, and of blue.
Fair were those Angels, passing fair.
No earthly beauty can compare
With theirs. But oh ! how pale, I ween,
Their beauty grows beside their Queen.

The savage brigands stood aghast,
Then on the ground themselves they cast,
And - strangers to their eyes for years —
Adown their rugged cheeks the tears
In streams of deep contrition flow,
They strike their breasts—they cower low,

And, " Mercy, mercy, Lord ! " they groan.
" Thy judgment dread, Thy power we own."

And now the monks have ceased their prayer,
And rising, stand confronting there
Two strangers in that lonely place,
Of lawless mien and savage face,
With naked swords which oft before
They ruthless steeped in human gore.
But oh ! was heard such sobbing then
As seldom shakes the frames of men,
And fear with gentle pity strove
Within their breasts : " For God's dear love,"
They wond'ring cried, " What brings you here ? "
" Why this wild grief, those looks of fear ? "
The robbers only answered by
Still louder sobs, and each fierce eye
Before those pure ones fell in shame.
Quenched was their late unholy flame.
They fell down at the monks' bare feet,
While sorrow in their wild hearts beat ;
With broken accent, heaving breast,
Their life's whole sins they then confest.
And oh ! if haply priestly ear
Such awful records seldom hear,
Seldom such contrite hearts bewail
With bitter tears the fearful tale.
The deepening shades of night now fall
Upon that strange confessional,
And in the depths of that lone wood
The robbers rise cleansed in the Blood

Of Him Who once was crucified
Another contrite thief beside.
Ave Maria, Angels sang,
And *Ave* through the forest rang,
And *Ave*, *Ave* echo we,
Praise ever to the Rosary,
Which wins for Christ this victory.

VI

THE KING'S COLLECTOR[1]

IN Africa, ere time, a great Lord dwelt,
Peter by name, collector of King's dues.
A man of stony heart, who never felt
Compassion's throb, and heard but to refuse
The beggar's meek appeal, the cripple's prayer—
No alms for such as them his purse could spare.

Daily he rode abroad, deaf to the cry
From the blue lips of hunger in the street;
The weeping orphan heedless he passed by;
The widow's moaning never stayed his feet;
The houseless stranger all in vain might wait
For shelter or for succour at his gate.

Daily he feasted in his stately palace—
Shivered the beggars in the cold outside;
Loudly he laughed, and deep from golden chalice
Drank the rich wine that flowed in crimson tide.
By slavish minions flattered, feared and fêted,
Beloved by none, by all the people hated.

He only came among them when the corn
In golden sheaves lay ready for the flail;
When to the wine-press purple grapes were borne,
And shepherds sheared the white flocks in the dale.

[1] This story is found in the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists, in the Life of St. John the Almoner.

Then, only then, the royal tax-man came,
To take large tribute in the Sovereign's name.

One day a group of beggars in the sun,
Warming themselves and chattering the while,
As beggars will, were naming one by one
Their friends, to bless them. With a scornful smile
Said one: "A blessing for Lord Peter now!"
Dark fell a shadow on each wrinkled brow.

"Aha! Lord Peter! he loves not the poor.
Hath any here received his bounty ever?
A crust, a cup of water at his door?"
But each one shook his head, and answered, "Never!
The dogs may eat the crumbs that fall each day
From his full table, but no Christian may.

"Bold were the beggar, though he starved for bread,
Who'd ask a crust of him." Then from the crowd,
"That beggar bold am I," a cripple said:
"Who wagers me to ask and win?" Aloud
The others laughed, yet wagered none the less,
With merry jesting wishing him success.

He took his stand outside Lord Peter's gate
For many hours. At last the proud man came
And scowled to see the daring beggar wait
So near his door, all ragged, poor, and lame;

Then closer drew his broidered mantle's fold.
No rags must touch its purple, stain its gold.

But when the beggar's prayer fell on his ear,
He sought a stone to hurl it at his head—
But stone found none. A baker's cart stood near.
He snatched a loaf therefrom to throw instead.
"My wager's won!" the beggar gladly cries,
Picks up the loaf, and carries off the prize.

That night, to Peter as he slept there came
A dream of agony. A clear voice said,
"Write me his sins, their number and their name."
Accusing demons crowded round his bed,
Bearing the evil records of his years,
While empty-handed angels watched in tears.

At last one angel spoke: "Know you he gave
To-day a loaf to Christ, though grudgingly?
Alas! can such scant alms avail to save?
See you that life of crime? And what have we
But one poor loaf this mountain to outweigh!
Yet what the loaf can't do, God's mercy may."

Then to Lord Peter: "At thy Saviour's Feet
One wretched loaf to-day from thy hand fell.
Though thrown ungraciously, to Him 'tis sweet,
And His Heart yearns to snatch thy soul from Hell.

But know; thy alms must grow. In scales Divine
This weight can never balance crimes like thine."

He woke up trembling in the cold grey dawn,
With new and strange emotions in his breast.
Cried he: "If one poor loaf in anger thrown
Doth profit me so much, 'tis manifest
That daily alms, with loving bounty given,
May save my soul from Hell, and open Heaven."

Changed was the proud man's spirit from that day,
His stony heart was melted, he became
The orphan's father and the widow's stay,
Friend to the leper, to the blind, the lame.
God's poor now looked at him as he passed by
With whispered blessing and with moistened eye.

The ragged children playing in the street
Now hailed him father; trustingly the while
Their little fingers clasping his to greet
Him as he passed, and win a kindly smile.
At first men doubted, but the doubt soon grew
To love as all his bounty came to view.

A sailor, so it chanced, from distant land,
Shipwrecked, and cast half-naked on the shore,
As Peter passed thrust forth a suppliant hand.
The great lord paused, then doffed the cloak he wore,

Fur-lined and silken, clasped with jewels rare,
And round the stranger folded it with care.

That night to him asleep, One passing fair
In vision came, One pale and travel-worn,
Blood-stained and weary; through His golden hair
The red drops trickled from each cruel thorn:
A heavy Cross His wounded shoulders bore,
But folded round Him Peter's cloak He wore.

His voice the stillness of the midnight broke—
Was ever heard on earth so sweet a sound?
"Peter," it whispered, "dost thou know this cloak?
When I was naked thou didst clasp it round
My shivering shoulders very tenderly,
And I have come to render thanks to thee."

Lord Peter woke. No more that night he slumbered.
"Thrice blessed poor!" was his enraptured cry;
"Since Jesus in you dwells, till I be numbered
Among your happy ranks, may I not die."
From that hour forward, wheresoe'er he trod,
In every pauper's face he saw his God.

Did baby hands touch his, 'twas God caressed him,
Christ's eyes met his through those of each young child.

That old man faltering was the Lord Who blessed
him,
And through the blind man's sightless eyes
He smiled.
Each beggar's grimy features bore the trace
Of that sweet, blood-stained, unforgotten Face.

Still, still resounded in his heart the cry,
"Let me be poor with Thee"; still unforgot
His deep desire, "Oh, may I never die
Till I be one with Thee, and cast my lot
With those thrice-blessed ones, identified
For ever with Christ Jesus crucified."

One day was mourning heard throughout the
city,
The toiler's hands were wrung in sore distress;
The widow's eyes were tearful in self-pity,
While, doubly orphaned, wept the fatherless.
The poor man's friend had fled, no one knew
where,
Nor could the gold he left his loss repair.

* * *

In that fair city wherein Jesus wept,
And toiled and bled 'neath skies of cloudless
blue;
Where Cedron's waters in the sunshine slept,
Where plane and olive, palm and cypress
grew;
Where rose to heaven the holy mountains trod
In weary vigils by the feet of God—

There in the house of Troilus dwelt a slave,
Unknown, uncared for, scoffed at by the rest,
A lowly, humble man, austere and grave.
None other than Lord Peter, once the guest
Of kings and princes : here in this poor guise,
A slave, an exile, under alien skies.

The other slaves revile him, beat him sore,
Blame all his work, and jeer at every blunder.
Fool ! dolt ! they call him. Patiently he bore
For Christ's sake all. Then grew his master's wonder
That from his lips there never fell complaint.
" A fool ! " he thought ; " a fool ! perchance a saint ! "

At times his many hardships weighed him down,
And bitter were the tears in secret wept ;
And in the silent night burst many a moan
From his o'erburthened heart while others slept.
But God his Master at such times was near
Noting each sorrow, counting every tear.

One night with heavy heart and aching frame,
His cheek still smarting from a cruel blow,
He went to rest ; when lo ! at midnight came
Once more that same sweet dream of long ago.
The Man of Sorrows ! Still His Cross He bore,
And still Lord Peter's fur-lined cloak He wore.

Once more he heard the music of that Voice :
" Why weepest thou ? " it whispered sweet and low.
" Be not afflicted ; nay, I say, rejoice :
Thy portion, like My own, is shame and woe.
What wouldst thou more than share thy Lover's lot,
Who bore much more for thee ? Weep not, weep not.

" See, I have here thy gift to Me, thy gold "—
Then opened out His slender wounded Hand—
" The price for which, My bondsman, thou wast sold,
A slave to strangers in a foreign land.
Now dry thy tears ; a little longer bear
Thy cross with Me, and then My glory share."

Thenceforth to Peter all his toil seemed sweet,
The blows he felt not, heeded not the scorn ;
And when they called him " fool," his great heart beat
With joy, for Jesus too that name had borne ;
For evermore that Voice rang in his ear,
And that dear blood-stained Face seemed always near.

* * *

Two noble lords, it chanced, whom once he knew,
Were fêted by his master. He stood by,
And served them as they dined. One of the two
Looked up and caught the holy slave's meek eye.

" 'Tis he ! Good God ! " he whispered –" sure,
'tis he ! "
That whisper Peter heard, and turned to flee.

He passed out through the hall, the door was
barred—
Then to the porter : " In Christ Jesus' name
Undo these bolts ! " O marvel ! " Yes, my
lord ! "
The porter spoke —first words that ever came
From those *sealed* lips—a poor deaf mute was
he—
And through the door passed Peter silently.

" My lord, my lord ! " the porter cried aloud—
His new-found voice amazing his own ear.
Soon gathered at his cries a wondering crowd,
Full keen the dumb man's utterance to hear.
With bated breath, their faces waxing pale,
They heard that loosened tongue's mysterious
tale.

Restless, they sought for many, many days
Through town and country ; searched each
forest path,
Walked weary miles through lonely tangled
ways,
By riverside and lake and fairy rath,
On dusty highways and through woodlands
green,
But never more on earth was Peter seen.

His end none knew but God : no mortal eye
Found out his grave. Doubtless this pleased him well.
He lived for God, and was content to die
With no one else anear. So none can tell
Where slept at last in peace the weary slave,
What spot on earth concealed his nameless grave.

VII

THE OUTCAST

ON a garret floor within a crowded city,
Lay a beggar woman dead;
Gathered round were all the neighbours,
but with pity
Not a heart among them bled.

She had died as she had lived, an outcast sinner;
There was none to speak her praise—
Long and vile had been her life and nought could
win her
From the evil of her ways.

Whence she came no one could tell, nor thought
it mattered;
All alone in her disgrace,
With her outcast soul defiled and sin-bespat-
tered,
She was gone before His Face.

From one kindly eye a tear there droppeth never,
Nor from gentle lip one prayer.
"Gone where lost souls wail for ever and for
ever,"
Was the verdict of all there.

Was that dismal verdict echoed up in Heaven
From the Judgment? Who can say?
"Not to men," thus saith the Lord, "to judge
was given,
It is Mine: I will repay."

Hard, perchance, to think an outcast of the city
Could in Heaven find a place.
But so merciful the Lord, so prone to pity,
Even such might win His grace.

He alone has felt the agonies that harrow
When He's forced to say "depart";
Surely dearer is the beggar than the sparrow
To our Saviour's bleeding Heart.

Leave her then within that Heart her sins have wounded,
Judge her not, ye sons of men.
Say, if e'er you see His love or mercy bounded,
She is lost, but not till then.

* * *

Weary with a long day's work 'mid sin and sorrow
In the crowded haunts of pain,
Lay the good priest down, to rest until the morrow
Call him forth to work again.

On his poor and narrow bed he soon was sleeping—
Surely 'tis the sleep of peace:
Nightly here from human sin and human weeping
Does his spirit find release.

But to-night nor sweet nor peaceful is his slumber,
Nor so undisturbed his breast;

For ere yet the midnight chimes complete their
number,
Came a dream to break his rest.

Came a dream, an awful dream, that clear and
vivid
Brought the Judgment-seat to view,
And before it, with her features wild and livid,
Cow'red a figure that he knew.

All alone she stands, alone with her Redeemer,
And His Face she dares not meet,
Yet that Face —was it the fancy of the dreamer ?
Seemeth pitiful and sweet.

In His Hand, His wounded Hand so pale and
slender,
Are the fate-deciding scales.
Thinks the priest : " Now what can save her ?
Who defend her ? "
And his heart within him fails.

Cometh first with fierce exulting mien the devil,
Never doubting of his prey,
In the scales he throws a hideous pile of evil
Surely nothing can outweigh.

Cometh next her angel trembling, very fearful,
One small trifle in his hand ;
Very pale his lovely features, pale and tearful,
While the demon's smiles expand

As he sees this one poor germ of hope upspringing
From the desert of her years,
One foul kerchief, grimy black, bedewed and wringing
With—so seems it—late shed tears.

For a wet and dirty rag, trows he, will never
Counterbalance that dread freight.
This poor soul is his for ever and for ever,
Nothing now can change her fate.

So the Father hides his face. The words eternal
Doubtless he full soon must hear,
Words that doom to endless woe and pain infernal
This poor soul that cost so dear.

He looks up. Upon his ear in voice of thunder
No dread words of judgment fall.
But the red crimes in the scales mount up—
O, wonder!
That wet rag outweighs them all!

Now he wakes, now sleeps again, the self-same vision
Comes once more distinct and clear:
Comes the Judge, the sinner waiting His decision,
Trembling, cow'ring in her fear.

Here the angel, there the devil, watching round her,
And the wet rag weighing down

All the dreadful crimes and sins that lately bound her,
Tramp and outcast of the town !

Thought the priest, when he awoke at dawn of morning,
Now what can this vision be ?
No mere dream is this, 'tis sure a heaven-sent warning,
I must seek her instantly.

'Tis but three days since I visited this sinner,
Sound in body, hale and well,
But her soul most sick —in vain I strove to win her.
Has she since died ? Who can tell ?

Straight in breathless haste he seeks her wretched dwelling,
And bends o'er the lifeless clay,
While the neighbours press around him eager telling
How they found her dead to-day.

Dead and lost for ever think they, never guessing—
What alone the Father guessed—
What that foul rag is her withered hands are pressing
Thus so closely to her breast.

For he sees the self-same rag he saw in vision,
And he knows that it is wet
With the hot tears of her late heartfelt contrition,
Which has paid the fearful debt.

When he kneels beside her corpse with heart o'erflowing,
And they see the streaming tears
On his cheeks they stare in wonder, only knowing
All the crimes of her past years.

They knew nothing of the marvels wrought between her
And her God in the dark night.
With her outcast soul all cleansed, they have not seen her
In her loving Saviour's sight.

O could we, could we, see those tears of sorrow,
How they weigh the red crimes down,
O ! what precious, priceless lessons we might borrow
From this outcast of the town.

VIII

MARCELLUS MASTRILLI, S. J., MARTYR

The little seed out of which the great tree grows.

PART I.—SCHOOLBOY

FAIR dawned the day, the holiday,
Bright was the sky, the birds were singing,
Within the College all was gay,
Loud on the air young laughter ringing.

Ready to start the boys were all—
With busy tongues and faces smiling,
Thronging the College steps and hall,
Their merry talk the time beguiling.

Hurrah ! for one long happy day
Of country sports in place of grammar !
To woods and glades, away, away !
With merry cheers and noisy clamour.

But who more ready, who more glad,
Or who more eager for the going
Than young Mastrilli—blue-eyed lad,
His cheeks with wild excitement glowing !

Of all the boys none better knew
Than he where thrush and skylark nested,
Where primrose, harebell, foxglove grew,
Or where the cooing pigeon rested ;

Where leaped the trout in streamlet cool,
  Where burrowed deep the knowing rabbit ;
At least as well as Latin rule
  He knew each woodland creature's habit.

None better loved than he to stray
  Among the marvels of creation,
And none had longed for dawn to-day
  With such intense anticipation.

But hark ! upon the morning air
  The Mass-bell's sound comes softly stealing ;
Unheeded by the others there,
  But to Mastrilli's soul appealing.

" No one to serve the Mass ! " they say.
  The vested priest stands at the altar.
No one to serve ! 'Tis holiday—
  What wonder his young heart should falter ?

One moment in the boyish soul
  A struggle raged in sight of Heaven ;
But ere the bell's next solemn toll,
  The victory to him was given.

One wistful backward glance he gave
  Towards his companions, but one only ;
Then donned his surplice, calm and brave,
  Though in his heart a little lonely.

Keenly the joys renounced he felt,
  But never in his purpose wavered ;

And as the priest beside he knelt,
His clear responses never quavered.

The priest received with glad surprise
The services he came to proffer ;
And said : " The Holy Sacrifice
For you, my child, to-day I'll offer."

PART II.—JESUIT

Beside fair Naples' sunny bay
Stands the Jesuit convent grey.
Within those old and reverend walls
To-day death's shadow darkly falls.
Not on the feeble and the old
Are laid this night his fingers cold.
No, he will choose from out the throng
Of labourers, the young and strong.
For least of all the Fathers there
Could they the young Mastrilli spare.
Yet now on him the choice doth fall,
To him has come the last dread call.
And is it thus, dear Mother, say,
With pain and death thou dost repay
The heartfelt love, the toil, the care,
Of this young priest to render fair
Thy church, thy altar, and thy shrine,
To honour that sweet name of thine ?
Fair was the day, and fair the scene
That greeted thee, most spotless Queen.
December's lovely feast—the day
When, echoing far across the bay,

Rang out from street and crowded fane
In loving tones the sweet refrain
With which all bosoms still vibrate,
" Immaculate ! Immaculate ! "

Hast thou forgot whose loyal hand
Had twined thy wreaths, whose heart had planned—
With loving care that never ceased—
The splendour of thy dearest feast ?
Whose voice the chorus led that day,
" Macula non est in te " ?
And when the last note of that hymn
Had died within the chancel dim,
And in the silent church alone,
Beside his Mother's flowery throne,
Mastrilli lingered to unbind
The garlands he had lately twined,
Amid the silence, none knew how,
The falling hammer struck his brow
And laid him bathèd in his blood
Low at her altar where he stood.
Were such the thanks thou didst bestow,
Mother ? For love a cruel blow ?
Death for his service at thy shrine ?
Yet it were sweet, dear Mother mine,
Such recompense ! Would I were he !
To toil and then to bleed for thee.

Falls darkly now the midnight gloom
Within the bare and humble room,

Where on his bed of straw he lies
With pallid face and sunken eyes.
The flickering lamp throws feeble rays,
One aged Father near him prays,
Beside him hangs, in framing quaint,
A picture of his patron saint,
On which through all those weary days
He loved to turn his dying gaze,
And fancied Xavier's glance the while
Met his with calm and pitying smile.
But why to-night so suddenly,
With such a startled look, does he
Upon the picture turn his eyes ?
The praying Father, in surprise,
Leaving a *Pater* half unsaid,
Sees his loved patient rise in bed,
And lo ! the voice for days before
So silent, which he never more
Had thought upon this earth to hear,
Now falls in whispers on his ear,
Though he can catch no single word.
He wonders what strange voice unheard,
In answering accents fills the breaks
That now and then Mastrilli makes.
And while he listens in suspense,
Soon in loud tones of joy intense :
" Father, I'm cured," Mastrilli cries ;
" Nay, look not with such awestruck eyes.
St. Francis Xavier here has been,
His very self just now I've seen.
He bade me rise, he bade me live,
He gave me life that I might give

It back in blood to God once more
Upon Japan's far distant shore.
He came to me in pilgrim's dress,
Which could not hide his loveliness.
'Marcellus, choose,' he gently said :
'Wilt thou be numbered with the dead,
Or wilt thou live ?' I made reply :
'Nay, what God wills, naught else will I.
No doubt 'tis sweet, aye, passing sweet,
My Saviour's smile so soon to meet,
And I confess 'twere grievous woe,
His longed-for presence to forego.
And yet 'twere joy to labour still
For love of Him ; but let His will
Be done to me. I care not, I—
So He be pleased—to live or die.'
To which the Saint : 'A martyr's fate
In far Japan may thee await,
The laurels that my brow have missed
May fall on thine—canst thou resist
This plea ? The sweetest lot of all
That could Loyola's son befall ?'
'Nay, blessed Saint,' I answering said,
'God knows how willingly I'd shed
My heart's best blood for His dear sake,
How proudly, gladly, I would take
His Cross to plant it in Japan
And share the labours you began ;
But what God wills, and that alone
Be done, no other will I own.'
Then brighter grew St. Xavier's smile :
'God's choice,' he said, 'falls on the isle

That I so loved ! What sayest thou ?
Wilt thou be my apostle now ?
Thou wilt ; then rise, be healed, and haste
The missionary's joys to taste ! '
Then touching soft the wounded brow
Where fell the hammer, ' Here, I trow,
Some sweet and precious drops were shed
For Mary's cause, bright ruby red !
But sweeter, redder streams shall run
In far Japan for Mary's Son.
For since Ferreyra's perfidy,
Loyola's sons across the sea
Stretch suppliant hands from every shore,
Praying to wash out in their gore
Th' apostate's crime, and end the shame
Shed on the sons of Jesus' name.
Thou art the chosen candidate
Thy brother's sin to expiate,
For when thy life-blood stains the sod
On which he had denied his God,
Aloud to Heaven that crimson rain
Will cry for him, nor cry in vain.
Farewell, upon th' eternal shore
We'll meet again to part no more.' ''

How many hearts next day rejoice,
How many lips with one glad voice
Join in *Te Deum's* glorious strain,
As on the altar once again

NOTE.—Father Ferreyra had apostatized under the torments, and continual prayers and penances were offered through Europe for his conversion.

Mastrilli in his vestment stands,
Off'ring with consecrated hands
The Sacred Host in fervent praise
Of all God's great and wondrous ways.

PART III.—MARTYR

And now the day, the blessed day and sweet,
So longed for, dawns with heavenly grace replete.
The day which brings Mastrilli's palm and crown,
The day when he in ruddy drops pays down
The price of pardon for his brother's sin,
His forfeit throne now back for him to win.
For thirteen cruel days Mastrilli bore
Tortures untold, increasing more and more,
While he but welcomed pain, for well he knew
How from each life-drop the apostate drew
Pardon and grace. Not one was shed in vain—
One day Ferreyra saw him in his pain,
And heard the prayer that offered it for him.
His hardened heart was touched, his eyes grew dim
With bitter contrite tears that never more
Would cease his base denial to deplore.
What two-fold joy that blessed double flood
Of sinner's tears and holy martyr's blood
Must spread through all the angel hosts in Heav'n,
Where joy increases at each sin forgiv'n !
The martyr in his dungeon waits his call,
To-day—oh, rapture—the sharp sword will fall

And sever life's frail cord. A little while,
And he will see the Bridegroom's loving smile.
Before the morrow's dawn his weary feet
Will tread the jasper in the golden street.
But ere he dies, before his upraised eyes
His bygone years in glorious vision rise.
A life of graces whose unbroken chain
Stretcheth far back from this last day of pain
To that on which he first had learned to prize
The sweets, the blessed sweets of sacrifice.
That happy day he never can forget,
He sees it now, he feels its gladness yet.
The merry throng, the laughter of the boys,
The Mass-bell's solemn toll above the noise,
The struggle in his heart, the victory,
The calm deep joy that filled his soul when he
Knelt at the altar-steps ! Again he hears
The good priest's welcome words above the years:
" God bless thee, child, the Holy Mass to-day
Shall be for thee, thy offering to repay."
Whispers his Angel now in that dim cell :
" The many graces to thy lot that fell
In such abundant, never-ending shower,
May all be traced, Marcellus, to that hour,
That was the first gold link forged up in Heav'n
Of that long chain which God to thee hath giv'n."

Ah, who can tell what joy Mastrilli felt

NOTE.—Father Mastrilli, on his way to martyrdom, took with him to Goa a rich silver shrine for the body of St. Francis Xavier, and he it was who instituted the Novena in honour of St. Francis Xavier.

As by the block soon willingly he knelt ;
The wondrous truth 'twas given him to see
How one small mustard-seed became a tree.
One little seed of grace that took deep root
In his young heart hath borne this glorious fruit:
The palm which he will bear eternally
Among the martyrs' happy company.

IX

THE BLIND HERMIT

OF old, by the banks of a stream where the cypress and pine cast their shadow,
Where kingcups grew thick, like gold stars, and the daisies were white in the meadow,
Where loud sang the lark to his mate in the first rosy flush of the morning,
Waking the village around with his music, his rapturous music—
"Wake, wake, for the fair dawn is breaking, wake up, every one, and be doing"—
Lived the hermit whose story I sing, in a moss-covered cave by the hill-side,
Forgetting the things here below in the wonderful thoughts of hereafter.
Silvery white was his hair with the snowflakes of seventy winters,
Bowed was his reverend head with the burden of seventy birthdays;
Sweet with the sunshine of Heaven the smile that beamed from his kind eyes,
Not of this earth was the light that enkindled his beautiful features.
Feeble his gait, but his brow bore the candour of innocent childhood,
Bare of the records of sin, dark with no shadow of frailty,
Thereon had virtue alone written a noble inscription;
Thereon in letters of gold deeply one word was imprinted,

One word—it was short, but from Heaven the angels were bending to read it –
Love was the word that they read, he had lived all his life in its sunshine.
The love of his God filled his heart, and thence overflowed to all creatures,
So that none could approach him and go without drawing nearer to Heaven.
And many there came to his cell, the poor, and the sick, and the mourner,
Seeking the hermit's aid, for he was the friend of the friendless,
And, like to the Master he served, welcomed the burthened and weary
With peace for the sorrowful heart and cures for the body's diseases.
For the old man was versed in the lore of the herbist, and skilled in the uses
Of simples, and daily he stored his mind with the wonderful knowledge
That the green things of God have laid up in their hearts for the searcher.
Daily he broke some new seal, till the deep-hidden secrets of nature
Revealed themselves to his eyes, as wondering he read her green pages.
The healing power of the balm, the poison that hides in the nightshade,
All, all were laid bare unto him ; for the good of his fellows he used them,
And thus from the village around all who were ailing came crowding—

Old men and maidens, and youths, mothers with sick little children—
And marvellous were the cures his modest prescriptions effected.
For years he had laboured preparing the garden wherein grew his simples,
Converting the hard stony soil into blossoming fruit-bearing borders,
Till all the bleak waste around was gay with flowers in the spring-time,
And all the still evening air was scented with sweet-smelling odours.

* * *

Now dearly the villagers loved the kind and saintly old hermit.
"Our father," they tenderly called him, and deep in their hearts he was imaged,
And each one rivalled the other to show him respect and affection.
The boys left their play for his blessing, the babe, in the arms of its mother,
Crowed aloud at his feeble approach ; but more, far more than all others
One loved him, an orphan boy whom he once had nursed through a fever.
A mischievous boy, who had stripped all his fruit-trees many a summer,
And whom he forgave, when one day the child leaned his head on his bosom
And weeping confessed his fault, as the old man sat by his bedside

To soothe and assuage his pain with a tenderness like to a woman's.
Came back then the memory of love in the destitute heart of the orphan—
Love that had once been his in the sunny days of his childhood,
Long ago, 'ere the world grew cold, so long that he scarcely remembered—
Till he seemed to feel on his brow the long-missing touch of his mother.
And his soul that was parched and dried up, now thawed at the words of the hermit,
Who gently whispered of God, of the all-loving Father in Heaven.
" Ah, never again," said the boy, " as long as I live shall I leave thee ;
And when I grow well once more I shall live with thee as thy servant."
Answered the hermit : " My son, it cannot be thus ; my vocation
Forbids a companion. Alone I must live." But the sick boy insisted ;
And said, as of old said to David his servant Ethai the Gethite :
" In what place soever my Father shall be there also his servant
Shall be. For love is strong—stronger than rules, my Father."
And when the fever had left him he sought the cell of the hermit,
And said, as the old man looked grave and motioned him back to the village,

" Oh ! send me not hence I beseech, for alas ! I have no one to love me.
And thou art the first I have loved since the angel of death took my mother ! "
But the prayer of the child was in vain, for gently answered the hermit :
" Thy service were sweet to my years and sweet were thy innocent prattle ;
Nevertheless thou must go. I have said that my life must be lonely."
And he barred the door in the face of the child, though his heart would have kept him.
But day after day brought the boy to the lonely moss-covered cavern.
And he would not go thence till the hermit, the gentle hermit, grew angry,
And bade him begone in a voice that was harsh for so loving a Father,
And left on the boy's tender heart a lingering pain that oppressed him.
With a sob in his throat he went forth to his desolate home in the village,
And thenceforward came only by stealth, when his Father was sleeping or praying ;
And watched by the door of his cell till he heard him come forth to the garden.
O ! then he would fly, and alone wander far o'er the hills and the valleys,
Over moor, over bog, and o'er fen, over woodland and streamlet and mountain,
In search of the flowers and the herbs that his Father might want for his garden ;

In search of the rare and the new, to add to his Father's collection,
And laid them all carefully down near his cell to be ready for planting.
Then when he learnt to know the hours of prayer of the hermit,
Stealthy and noiseless he crept like a thief in the night to the garden ;
Not now to rob apples he went, but to pull up the grass from the gravel,
To sweep the dead leaves from the paths, to tie up the flowers in the borders,
To weed and to rake and to dig, and set the whole garden in order.
One day the hermit at last encountered the boy at his labours,
And smilingly said : " O ! my son, thou hast faithfully toiled and I thank thee ;
But now I pray thee begone, and come not again, an you love me."
" My Father, I love thee indeed, but leave thee," he answered, " I will not."
And the hermit went silent away, for the love of the child was too faithful
For harshness ; he could not be stern to a heart that had erred but by loving.

* * *

Thus passed the years, till one spring, a spring that was never forgotten,
When all the hedges were white, white with the snows of the hawthorn,

When the trees were alive with the chant of the wild feathered choir of the forest—
Lo ! the bright hues of the flowers seemed pale to the eyes of the hermit,
And they grew paler still in the summer, paler and shapeless.
And when the gay tints of the summer gave place to the brown shades of autumn,
The hermit grew heavy at heart, for he knew that his eyesight was failing.
And behold when the winter was come, and the flowers of the garden lay withered,
With the snow lying thick on their graves, the long-dreaded shadow has fallen ;
The light is gone out, and 'tis night for the poor old hermit henceforward.

Soon, soon the boy's watchful eyes note the change in the old man's appearance.
The feeble and faltering step that grew every day more uncertain,
The vacant look in the eyes, the trembling hands that were stretched out,
Feeling his way down the paths, and groping for flowers in the border.
All, all are seen by the eyes, the young eyes that love has made watchful ;
Though dimmed are they now by his tears, the tears of a poignant compassion
For the eyes whose light is blown out by the breath of the Lord in the night time.

But now came the boy's reward, in the day of the hermit's bereavement.
For when in his darkness he found a guide that was always in waiting,
An arm on which he could lean, a hand ever eager to help him,
The old man unconsciously grew to depend on his guide, and no longer
Bade him begone as of yore, and at last, one day said the hermit :
" Abide with thy father, my son, God wills it, He sees that I need thee."
And the child with joy in his heart abode with the hermit thenceforward.
And the winter passed, and once more the woods were sweet with the anthem
Of blackbird and thrush and sweet finch, of red-breast and little brown linnet.
And in the bright sunshine the child would lead the old man to the garden,
Naming in turn each flower, and describing its place in the borders,
Till through the blue eyes of the child, the sightless hermit beheld them.
Then from each one would he draw some lesson of heavenly wisdom—
How God was revealed in each flower, in the smallest weed in creation :
" The rose," he would say, " the red rose with its beauty and exquisite fragrance
Proclaims His wonderful love ; His purity see in the lily ;

And the crimson flower of the Passion, with Calvary's sacred memorials,
The nails and the crown of thorns, recalls His ineffable anguish ;
And the rosemary, flower of the dead, down by the gate of the garden,
Reminds us of those gone before, and that time here below is soon ended :
And beyond it the evergreen yew, the emblem of life everlasting,
It was well planted, my son, for beyond the grave lieth Heaven."
Thus would the old man discourse, and he always ended by saying :
" May all the sweet flowers and green herbs bless the Lord God of Creation."
And baring his head the boy, " Amen," would reverently answer.
But the heart of the hermit was heavy, for he grieved at the loss of his eyesight.
With patience and joy he had borne a life of want and of hardship
For the love, the dear love of his Lord ; but now he repined for his blindness,
Crying : " Dark is the way, O my God ! and weary that Thou hast appointed.
Deliver me, Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver me out of my blindness ! "
And when with the boy in the garden, he sorted herbs in the sunshine,
The child's quick ear heard him murmur," Alas ! is no cure for the curer ?

No sight-giving herb to restore the lost light to these poor useless eyeballs ? ''
And grief filled the heart of the boy because of his old Father's sorrow,
For dearly—more dearly each day—he had grown to love the good hermit.
" O God," he would cry in his guileless heart, " our Father in Heaven,
Harken the orphan's prayer, O ! make me blind an Thou willest it,
But grant that once more, as of old, my Father may see the sunlight."
One day as the boy near the cell of the hermit was listening and watching,
For the hour was come when together they daily went to the garden,
The old man came forth, and lo, his footfall sounded less feeble.
There was joy lighting his face, and a break in his voice from emotion.
" Where art thou, my son ? " he said, " come hither, I've tidings to tell thee.
There is hope, my dear child, there is hope ; for the Lord hath vouchsafed me a vision.
Listen to me while I tell thee the things that in sleep have befallen me.
Methought I stood in a garden filled with a thousand sweet odours ;
Thou wert beside me, my son, and outside a multitude crowding
With maladies, ulcers, and sores, all claiming the aid of my simples.

And with thy assistance, dear child, to each one
I gave what he needed.
And when they were gone, every one, leaving
behind them a blessing,
My heart grew sad, and I cried : ' Where is the
cure for the curer ? '
And lo ! a clear voice at my side answered :
' Here, what thou seekest is nigh thee !
Seek on for awhile for the herb that will surely
give thee thy vision.
Once find it and thou shalt see. It is called the
trefoil of the Passion.'
I turned me round towards the Voice, but saw
nothing—because of my blindness,
And I called out to thee, sore surprised : ' Tell
me, my son, who has spoken ? '
And thou didst make answer : ' My Father, a
man in the dress of a pilgrim,
Who holds a strange herb in his hand, a little
green herb that I know not.'
And methought thou didst then take the plant
from out of the hand of the pilgrim
And place it in mine, and behold ! as soon as I
touched it I saw thee.
And O ! thou wert fair, passing fair, far fairer
than I had remembered.
The garden, the garden, too ! more lovely than
dream could have pictured.
But the face of the pilgrim I saw not. 'Twas
hid in the folds of his mantle."
" What like," said the boy, " was the herb, I
pray thee to tell me, my Father ? "

" A tiny green plant, O my son, and like, much like to the clover.
Its leaves were three on one stem, and on each was a deep, crimson blood-stain ;
Its root was the strangest I've seen, composed of a thorny corona.
' Of Charity, Faith, and Hope,' said the pilgrim, ' these leaves are the emblems—
The triple outcome of the Passion, having their root in its Sorrows.' "

And all the long day at his labours, and through the still night in his slumbers,
The boy heard him whisper with joy, " I shall see, I shall see, when the herb comes."
And day after day in his Faith, the old man waxed stronger and stronger ;
And day after day in his Love, the boy became more and more joyful,
Thanking God for the Hope that had come, in the darkness and gloom for his Father.
And the song in both hearts was the same : " I shall see," " He shall see—when the herb comes."
And so passed the spring and the summer, and in the lone days of the autumn
There came to the garden one evening a man in the dress of a pilgrim,
Who called to the boy at the gate, and gave a strange root to him, saying,
" Take this to thy master, and say 'tis the plant that he long has been seeking,

The plant called the Passion trefoil, that is to restore him his eyesight."
So vanished. The boy took the root and went slowly to search for the hermit.
O, slowly and sadly he went; though he held in his hand what he longed for,
In his heart was the shadow of fear; he had looked on the face of the pilgrim
And knew he had seen it before, and that sorrow walked quick in his footsteps.
And his clear boyish accents broke down, as he said to the hermit, "My Father,
Here is the root we have prayed for. To-night, to the gate, came the pilgrim—
The pilgrim—alas! of thy dream. My Father, I've looked on his features,
And I know that I've seen them, and where, for his face to my heart is familiar.
For when I lay sick, you remember, and fever was rife in the village,
I saw a tall shadowy form oft pass up and down by the window,
And his face was the face of the pilgrim that came to the gate of the garden.
Once before I had seen that same face bend over my young mother's coffin
When God took her out of my life. And O, Father, I cannot deceive thee,
Methought at that time, methinks now, 'twas the Angel of Death that I looked on."
And the boy burst forth into sobs, but the sightless old man only answered:

" We'll plant the strange root, O my son, and see what the good God will send us.
And now, my sweet child, weep no more ; it may be thou hast been mistaken."
But he looked very grave as he spoke, and a great sense of awe came upon him.

Together they planted the root, in a sheltered nook in the garden.
Thenceforth the hermit grew weak, but the child tried hard to be hopeful ;
And as daily he watered the root, his loving heart kept repeating :
" When it blooms, O my God ! when it blooms, will he not see the fair sunshine ? "
But the hermit was silent, and trembled when he thought of the fast-coming spring-time,
And only said : " My son, I repent me that I've not been patient
Under the cross that my Lord hath in His wisdom appointed,
And repined that He willed mine eyes to become thus sightless and useless.
But now, though 'tis late, my heart prays that His dear will may be done in me."
And when the boy urged : " Thou shalt see in the spring,"—" If God wills," he would answer.
And his prayer was no longer, " O Lord, deliver me out of my blindness,"
But morning and noon and at night : " As Thou willest, O Lord, as Thou willest."

And lo ! in the early spring came the first small shoot of the plantlet,
Tenderly green, and the boy rejoiced with exceeding great gladness.
" O Father," he cried, " thou shalt see, very soon thou shalt see ! " But the hermit
Trembled and shook his head : " God's will be done," he said only.
And every morning at dawn the boy came to watch the small shamrock,
That held shut up in its leaves the light for the eyes of his Father,
And said : " My Father, it grows, so soon thou shalt see the sunshine,
And the flowers in the garden once more."
" His will be done," said the hermit.
At last one evening the boy said : " The plant breaks forth, and to-morrow—
To-morrow my Father shall see ! " And all that night he spent watching
In the pale moonlight beside it, untiring and sleepless till morning ;
And with the first flush of the dawn came the little green plant into being,
And lo ! as the hermit had said, on each tiny leaf was a blood-stain.
Fast flowed the tears of joy on the plant from the eyes of the watcher.
He plucked it in haste, and ran with his prize to the cell of the hermit.
But the old man lay still, very still, on his couch.
Said the boy, " He yet sleepeth ;

I will not disturb him now ; he will find the herb when he wakens."
And he laid it beside the bed and went back again to the garden.

Soon in the sweet morning silence there came a loud cry from the hermit :
" My son, my son ! " Then answered the boy : " I am here, O my Father ! "
As he spoke, the hermit came out and the child saw his eyes were open,
And cried as the old man passed : " Dost thou see, dost thou see, O my Father ? "
And the hermit replied : " I see now," and sped out of sight in the stillness.
And the boy as he gazed grew fearful, for the steps made no sound on the gravel.
Silently, softly, he passed out by the rosemary blossoms,
And on beyond the dark yew, the emblem of life everlasting.
And never did he come back, though long the boy waits his returning.

At last, with a heart full of fear, he seeks the cell of his Father.
Within very still, very cold, on his narrow straw bed lay the hermit,
And in his dead hand was the herb, the mystic trefoil of the Passion,
That had burst forth and opened its leaves when the blind eyes opened in Heaven,

And saw—not this earth with its flowers and the wonderful things of creation—
But the Face of the Lamb, which alone is the Light of the Heavenly City,
Where sun never shineth nor moon, nor the bright golden stars of the midnight;
For the Lamb is the Lamp thereof, and the Wounds of the Crucified Jesus.

O'erawed and struck dumb stood the boy by the side of the dead—broken-hearted,
And he gazed on his Father's face, when lo! it shone bright like an angel's,
And the child at the sight cried aloud: "My Father sees more than the sunlight.
O! take me, my Father, take me too; the orphan has no one to love him!"
And the young heart broke, and the boy lay dead at the feet of the hermit.
They had lived and had laboured together, and in death they were not divided.
And they walk hand in hand through the land wherein there is no need of sunshine.

X

THE WEIGHT OF THE HOLY ROOD

FAIR in the sunshine of a Spanish noon,
Amid the lovely Andalusian vales,
Don Mancio's home was gleaming through the trees,
As, riding from its portals, he looked back
To catch one last, last look of all he loved.
Heading a band of faithful followers,
Whose shining armour many sad hearts cased—
His babe's sweet kisses moist upon his lips—
He goes to battle for the Christian cause
Against the Moors. It was a goodly sight—
That winding train of Spanish warriors
Who went with him to victory or death ;
Tall plumes that waved and tossed in every wind,
And silver helmets glancing in the sun,
And lances bright that flashed like lightning rays
At dazzling intervals between the trees.
They rode through scenes of beauty unsurpassed,
Through narrow paths between the purple hills,
By swollen torrents leaping through the pines,
By fields of maize and shady olive groves,
Where orange tree and oleander grew
In rich profusion, scenting all the air.
But nought of this saw Mancio in his grief :
His young wife's face—her pale and tender face
Shut out all else ; a face all marred with tears,
The first those eyes had shed since he had brought
Her to his home four golden years ago.

Four golden years! Alas! how quick they sped.
No cloud on their brief happiness till now!
But now! Ah, now has struck the hour of pain,
The hour of their good-bye! The knell has tolled
Of their short joy. The Master Who had blest
Their happy home with peace and holy love
Now calls for their surrender—Freely given;
For they are faithful servants of the Cross;
And 'mid their happiness forget not Him
From Whose dear hand both joy and sorrow come.
"'Tis well," the young wife said amid her tears,
"My knight goes forth to battle for the Cross,
And for no earthly prince's paltry strife,"
As with a proud and breaking heart she strove
To fasten on her husband's heavy sword.
How passing fair she seems, how like a saint,
As with the light of joy renounced for God
Enkindled on her youthful face, she says:
"God bless thee, Mancio; may He send thee safe.
And if—ah me," she sobbed—"if thou do fall
In His good cause, Jesu, Thy will be done."
How fair she looks, and holy as she stands
So bravely on the doorstep of their home,
With sweet pale lips that struggle for a smile,
Their three-year baby sobbing on her breast.
This was the picture, as he rode along,
The pine trees' sighing branches framed for him,
And not the landscape's fair reality.

" Alas," he thinks, " my wife, my baby boy,
It may be I shall never see them more ! "

* * *

The morning dawns upon the battlefield,
And Moor and Christian meet in bloody strife.
'Ere nightfall many a Christian warrior sees
The God of battles at the judgment-seat,
While many more are sighing in their chains
That they have missed the sword-cut in the field
Only to meet the cruel lash, and know
That they are slaves—slaves of the ruthless Moor.
And as the slave-ship bears them fast away,
Lo, one turns back his eyes and fettered hands
Towards Spain with a heart-breaking bitter cry
That rends the clouds and strikes God's ear in Heaven :
" My wife, my little one, farewell, farewell ! "

* * *

Oh, few have known the deep mysterious joy
That suffering in patience bringeth forth
After long throes of agony untold.
Few know its taste, because few bear their pain
With willing hearts for Him Who died to show
The way to joy through thorny paths of woe.
That mystic happiness Don Mancio learned
In his captivity ; therefore his brow,
Haggard with pain and toil and hope deferred,
Yet bore a light of sweet serenity
Which puzzled men—unknowing whence it came.

Ten weary years beneath the Moorish lash
He toiled in chains. No word, no news from
home
In all that time there came to cheer his way.
The stripes the lash had left, the daily toil,
The scanty food, the slave's hard drudgery
Were easier, far easier to be borne
Than was that slow starvation of the heart—
That death-like silence withering his soul
Which famished for his loved ones far away—
His wife, his child. "Oh, God, for one short
word,
One little word to tell me that they live!
Are they at home in Andalusia still?
Rove they the woods in search of early flowers
Where I and they have wandered hand in hand
In those first happy days of wedded life
Beneath the blue, blue sky of sunny Spain?
Or have they sought a refuge for their sorrow
In stranger lands that teem not with the thoughts,
The memories of what, alas, hath been
And is no more?—no more!—know they my
fate
Or mourn they, as one mourneth for the dead?"
Alas! these burning questions racked his brain;
But through the deep, deep silence of the years
There came no answer. One kind Friend alone
He found in his captivity—One Friend
To counsel and to comfort him through all.
And he had learned to love Him in his woe
As he had never loved Him in his weal.
That Friend was One Who in His own distress

Had none to comfort Him. From Him he learned
To love his bitter cross and to endure
In sorrow, " taking all that should be brought
Upon him." Then it was he tasted joy.

Each day as he to nineteen others chained
Passed through the gateway to his toil, he saw
The Image of that Friend—the Crucifix—
And at the sight his heart grew sick and faint,
For that dear Image ravished by the Moors
From some fair Spanish church by them despoiled
Was set up in derision on this gate.
And as of old the prophet sang, so now :
" All they who saw Me laughed Me unto scorn,
And they who sat within the gate did speak
Against Me." For that sacred Face was made
The target of foul spittle, stones, and filth
For passers-by. Again the Son of Man
Was crucified and Golgotha renewed.
Don Mancio's blood was seething inwardly.
Oh ! could he spill that blood in His defence,
And save his Master's honour with his life,
How willingly, how gladly he would die !
Alas ! his hands are chained : his trusty sword
Lies rusting on the fateful battlefield :
But in his heart of hearts he vowed a vow
That if God willed, and he once more were free,
Ne'er would he rest until he had redeemed
That crucifix, and set it in a shrine,

Where love and honour should wipe out the shame
Of all those years of insult and of scorn.
This was his dream by night, his thought by day,
Till those sad features grew into his heart,
Imprinting themselves there as once of old
Upon the napkin of Veronica,
All else effacing in their sacred grief.

Thus passed the night, the cold and starless night
Of his imprisonment. The dawn is near,
But yet he knows it not. The darkest hour
Has still to come ere he can see the light.

"Remember me," imprisoned Joseph said
To one who soon forgot—"Remember me
When it is well with thee." All captives since
Repeat this prayer to dear ones far away.
Thus prayed, too, Mancio and his fellow-slaves,
Stretching their shackled hands towards those who once
Had loved them in the sunny land of Spain.
"Remember me when it is well with thee,
Thy gold can bribe the Moor to set me free,
When it is well with thee forget me not."
And Spain made answer—"Ne'er will I forget."
And so at times across the sea there came
Brave Spanish missionaries, bearing gold
To ransom some, to some to whisper hope;
To comfort all with news of home and friends,
And more than all, to breathe the healing words
Of absolution, and O rapture! give

The Bread of Angels to their famished souls.
Long was the road and weary that they came,
Braving both death and danger on the way.
Long were they watched for, welcomed with deep joy
Even by those for whom they brought no hope.
To these they came—as to the olive grove
In lone Gethsemane there came of old
The Angel sent to strengthen, not release.

Don Mancio watched and waited, but in vain—
To him no ransom came. Within his breast,
At each arrival from the Spanish coast,
New hope sprang up, but sank again in gloom
Deeper and darker, as he watched them go.
Was he forgotten? Was his young wife dead,
That thus the weary years creep slowly on
Without a word from her? 'Twas large, he knew,
The ransom that the Moor had named; but she
At any cost, at any sacrifice,
Would surely raise it. Ah! she must be dead!—
Or—stay—perchance she knows not even yet
The place of his captivity, for none
Of all the bands of ransomers that came
Had known Don Mancio, nor could tell him news
Of Andalusia—none had come from there.

But came at last to that long night a dawn
When he too was remembered. Until now
His wife could learn no tidings of his fate,

Knew not if on the battlefield he died,
Or, if alive, in what far clime he pined.
But she, whose hope could not be crushed in fear,
Toiled—suffered—grudged herself the needs of life
To hoard for him. And lo ! chance has revealed
His dungeon, and the ransom has arrived
To-day. An hour ago her envoy came.
And now one short night more to sleep in chains—
To-morrow the slave-master will receive
His price in gold—then freedom, home, and love !
His heart beats fast, his eye is bright with joy ;
He sees his wife, his little one—he hears
Their words of welcome, feels their soft embrace—
Is it a dream ? How many times before
Have such dreams mocked him in his loneliness
With pictures of his home ! Is this one more ?
O God of sweet compassion ! if it be,
Let me not wake, let me sleep on awhile !
But no ! not here the vague fantastic shapes,
The changing whims and vagaries of dreams ?
And lo ! beside him standing in the flesh
The good Franciscan Father who has brought
The ransom which to-morrow sets him free.
This is no shadow. This can be no dream.

With beating heart, yet hiding from the Moor
His secret transport, to his evening task—

His last—he passes through the gates. And, lo !
He sees the sacred and dishonoured rood,
The image deeply graven on his heart,—
Dimmed for a moment by his new-found bliss
But still the Master and the Ruler there—
He lifts his eyes and as he passes, looks
" On Him Whom he has pierced." That blood-
stained face
Seems paler than Its wont ; in those sad eyes
He seems to read reproach ; upon those lips
The tremor of a deep unuttered thought :
" Am I forgotten, Mancio, in thy joy ?
Wilt thou go hence and leave Me here to bear
The daily shame heaped on Me by the Moor ? "
Was it his fancy ? Did he really hear
A thrilling voice repeating o'er and o'er,
" Wilt thou go hence and leave Me ? " " O my
God,
What can I do ? I have no money—none !
Or I would take Thee with me to my home
Where all should pay Thee honour. When I go
My heart's first sacred business shall be
Thy ransom." " When I go ! But canst thou
go ?
And leave Me ? " Then before him flashed a
thought
That like a sword-stab quivered in his heart—
" My ransom-money ! that would buy the
Cross ! "
But could he face that fearful life again,
And rob his wife and child of happiness ?
" O God ! Thou canst not ask that sacrifice ! "

"Wilt thou go hence and leave Me?" pleads
the Voice.

No sleep Don Mancio knows that livelong night.
A stormy battle rages in his soul—
Two loves therein are meeting face to face.
The love of home and kindred, and the love
Of Jesus crucified. "O Lord," he sobs,
"I am not willing—save me from myself—
By Thine own bitter Passion, by Thy Cross,
Have pity on me. Let this chalice pass."
But still that Voice—that awful, pleading Voice,
In the deep stillness, like the muffled sound
Of many waters murmurs, "Wilt thou go
And leave Me here alone?" Within his heart
A louder voice makes answer: "Canst thou
stay
And send instead of thee that crucifix,
That heavy iron cross, to crush the heart
That waits for thee, that counts the days and
hours?
Bethink thee of her lonely widowhood,
The days and nights of weeping she has spent—
Wilt thou revive them all? Ah, pity her,
If not thyself!" Again that other Voice,
Weaker and fainter now, but still distinct:
"The man that more than Me loves wife or
child
Unworthy is of Me!" "O God," he cried,
"Have pity! spare me! Must I cruelly stab
The heart that loves me? Let this chalice pass."

In that dread hour his anguished soul descried
A lonely Garden, and beneath the trees—
The scented olive trees—in agony
The Man of Sorrows there. He too had known
The cost, the bitter cost, of bringing grief
On all who loved Him. He too had endured
This heart strife, and had shrunk before the pain.
And Mancio's grief grew tranquil in the light
Of that mysterious agony of God.
And he sobbed forth, "Thy bitter will be done,
My God, my God! I cannot—will not go
And leave Thee in Thy shame." He rose up strong,
The battle ended, Christ the Conqueror!
He rose, and lo! the dawn was breaking fair,
The longed-for dawn that was to hail him free.
To-day the ransom-money shall be paid—
But not for him. He shall be still a slave—
And yet he is not sad. His heart knows peace.
For said I not the Cross doth bring forth joy?—
Of which brave souls like Mancio's know the taste.
"For they who lose their life for Me," One said,
"Again shall find it," even here below.

The market-place was crowded. On the air
The busy hum of many voices rang.
And Moor and Christian, slave and master thronged
To witness a strange scene. The news had spread

That one of those whose ransom had been sent
From Spain but yesterday, had just foregone
His longed-for freedom, and exchanged himself
For that old rood that hung long desecrate
Above the gate. He must be surely mad,
This Christian nobleman, to send his wife
A worthless piece of iron in his stead,
While he remains a captive till his death,
Renouncing all the comforts of his home
For such a foolish bargain. It is said
The Moor demands for that huge iron cross
Its weight—not less—in silver ducats down,
Nor will relent. Whence can that ransom come ?
That massive cross is all in iron wrought
And life-size. Lo ! they come to weigh it now !
And Moor and Christian crowded round to see—
The Moor with jeers, the Christians sobbing loud—
The man who thus could sacrifice himself
To share the heavenly folly of the Cross.
" Think well, my son," the holy Father said—
As strong men slowly lowered the heavy rood
To place it in the scales. " Think well, my son ;
The ample store of money I have brought
To ransom thee will scarcely meet the weight
Of that large crucifix. Thy wife has spent
Long years in gathering, and it may be
Long years, if ever, ere she can send again
An equal sum to meet the Moor's demands.
Hast counted well the cost ? " For one brief space

A thick mist swam before Don Mancio's eyes,
That mirrored in its depths his wife and child.
He seemed to clasp them to his beating heart,
To feel their kisses warm upon his lips—
He well-nigh faltered—but he turned away
From that sweet vision—all too sweet it seemed,
Too dangerously sweet—and sees instead
Those glaring Moorish eyes, and hears the lash
Fall on a guiltless slave charged with neglect—
This is the life that will be his till death—
" My Father, I have counted all the cost
And I am ready." " Be it so, my son."
And in the scales the heavy cross was laid,
And one by one the silver ducats fell.
Men held their breath to count them as they rang
Against each other in the silent air,
While still the heavy cross lies motionless.
Alas ! can all that money move its weight
One inch from off the ground —one, two, three, four—
The Father counted, praying all the while
" God grant there be enough to weigh the cross."

But when, O when, has it been ever known
That our dear Lord and Master paid not back
A hundred-fold for every act of love ?—
Just thirty silver pieces had been told,
When, lo ! the scale that held the crucifix
Rose high in air. The other scale went down.
O miracle ! the cross has been outweighed !
For thirty silver pieces long ago

The God made Man was sold—now once again
At thirty silver pieces He is pleased
To rate Himself to set His servant free;
For Mancio, too, is ransomed. There is still
An ample sum to satisfy the Moor.
His Lord, the solace of his captive hours,
Will not go hence and leave *him* here a slave—
The Ransomed and the ransomer are free.

XI

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH

IN that dim light which sheds its beams around
The tabernacle of the Lonely King,
A young monk, bowed in adoration, knelt.
He was alone with his beloved Lord,
His soul o'erflowing with seraphic joy
With which the hidden God transports the soul,
Making the holy place unto the lowly
And the clean of heart a Heaven on earth—
To them the promise: "They shall see their God."
Of such in truth was he who knelt there now,
That simple monk, whose humble charge it was
To tend the convent gate. Few there were among
The careless throng he daily opened to,
Who guessed that old brown garb concealed a saint.

His brethren knew his worth, the poor around
Called Brother Aelred holy, and would kneel
To kiss his blessed footsteps as he went
His daily round of errands through the town.
The Abbot watched his rapid growth in grace,
And loved him passing well. None sought to hide
Their reverence for his humble sanctity.
With fear his simple heart was often filled
When words of praise or commendation fell
Upon his ear—a most unwelcome sound
To him who lived and worked for God alone.

" What if mine ear should drink the poison in
And I should wound my Lord by hideous pride ? "
The thought alone was anguish, for he knew
How weak, how frail, but not how good he was.
Just now he meets his Master's pallid Face,
Raised on the Cross above the altar throne,
So pale, so sad, so patient in Its woe.
That thorn-crowned Head, those nailèd Feet and Hands
A mute reproach awoke within his soul.
" Am I the servant of the Crucified,
The Outcast of the people, Who was ranked
With publicans and sinners while He lived,
And placed between two robbers when He died ?
Can it be well that I, the slave, be flattered,
While on my Master's ear falls blasphemy ?
Oh, be it so no more ! " From his full heart
Bursts forth in loving tones the fervent prayer :

" Jesus, my Lord, my Love, my King,
Look on this vile unworthy thing
That calls Thee Master. Seest Thou
The wreaths of honour on my brow,
Whilst on *Thy* wounded Temples glow
The bloody drops from thorns that flow.
Oh, strip these laurels from my head,
And give me thorns from Thine instead.
Hearest Thou not, my dearest Lord,
The plaudits human lips award
To Thy poor slave unlawfully,
While scoff and jeer are all for Thee ?

Take Thou the praise and let me hear
Henceforward taunt and gibe and sneer.
Take Thou my undeserved good name
And make me sharer in Thy shame.
If so it please Thy holy will,
Let hearts that now revere, think ill
Of Thy poor servant ; let me be
Despised and shunned for love of Thee.
Let me of worldly joys have dearth,
For no desire have I on earth,
Nor yet in Heaven but only Thee.
Thou art my God and Thou wilt be
My portion through Eternity."

The door bell rang, and Brother Aelred left
His prayer at once to answer it, nor guessed
How soon, how very soon, his prayer is heard.
The Abbot's nephew stood without the porch,
A gay young gallant, envoy from the Court,
Bearer of gold for Masses from the Queen.
A playful youth, whose sportive tongue discoursed
Not much of wisdom, and who liked to tease
And banter Brother Aelred, whom he loved
And reverenced in his merry careless heart.
" Ha ! Brother Aelred, still the same, I see.
Hast not repented yet of all thy crimes ?
Lead on, lead on, into my uncle's cell ;
I come to bring him greeting from the Queen,
Greeting and gold—gold, brother, that would make

Thy teeth to water and thine eyes to start
From out their sockets. Aye, I read thy soul ! "
Thus bantering they reached the Abbot's cell,
But e'en his reverend presence failed to check
His nephew's merry tongue : " See, uncle mine,
Here comes a sinning brother to confess,
His soul is yearning for these golden coins
Her Majesty hath sent thee. Aye, 'tis true,
Greed lurketh, Brother Aelred, in thine eye.
Nay, cross thyself and look as horrified
As if the devil stood behind thy chair ;
Thou knowest thou dost wish the gold were thine."
" Come, cease thy fooling, boy," the Abbot said,
But, as he chid, betrayed perforce a smile,
To think of Brother Aelred craving gold,
Knowing his holy love of poverty,
And glancing with a fond paternal eye
On the patched habit and oft-mended shoes.
" Ah, no ! " he thought, " in that pure fervent soul
There lurks no guile, far less a greed for gold."

His nephew quick took leave, for he was bound
Upon a foreign embassy, nor soon
Would he behold his uncle's face again.
But still went off with jest upon his tongue.
" Farewell, mine uncle, keep a watchful eye
On that young sordid brother. Lock the gold
Safe in thy chest. Now, Aelred, fare thee well.
Take heed while there is time. Repent ! Repent ! "

Indulgently the Abbot shook his head,
And answered only by a lenient smile.

His nephew's laugh had scarcely died away
Ere loudly rang the bell for noonday meal,
By recreation followed, then by prayer
And Vesper hour of Office sung in choir.
And thus the evening twilight had begun
Ere stood the Abbot in his cell again,
With deep anxiety upon his brow,
For lo ! the desk on which he laid the gold,
Four hours ago, was bare—the gold is gone.

'Tis night ! The self-same sacred hour wherein
The Son of Man had prayed the cup might pass.
Meet hour for souls whose life perforce is spent
In lone Gethsemane to weep and pray.
And here is one ! Again before the throne
Kneels Brother Aelred. His pale lips no more
In supplication move. His prayer is heard !
And he adores in silence still as death.
His prayer is heard ! His bleeding heart alone
Entreats for grace to bear his heavy cross.
His prayer is heard ! Oh, lonely evermore,
In desolation and in friendlessness,
Must lie his thorny path. Farewell, farewell,
To honour, reputation, and fair fame.
No more his ear shall hear the sound of praise,
No more his hands be trusted with the care
Of gold or treasure. He must stand aside,
A useless burthen, all unworthy deemed
Of credit or commission. Leave to toil

May yet be granted in offices judged safe.
But yet not here the sting ; these things touch not
His heart. But oh ! the woe, the agony,
Of looking into eyes that once with love
Smiled back into his own, and meeting there
Naught now but cold suspicion, doubt, mistrust !
For can the kindest eye look now on him,
And not reveal such thoughts ? Alas ! how not ?
The gentlest heart must harbour doubt of him
Who bears upon his brow the brand of shame.
For all had seen his sin's mute evidence—
Had marked the golden coins roll on the floor,
When from his bed they lifted his poor cloak.

Aelred, thy prayer was heard ! In that dread hour
Mute silence as of death fell on them all,
And he stood there before them with white face,
Convicted in their sight of felony.
And when his brethren, without look or word,
Went out amid the stillness one by one,
And left him standing in his guilt and shame,
Beneath the Abbot's stern condemning frown,
His soul drank all the bitterness of death
For one brief moment, then it stood erect
And knew itself for evermore alone
In all the wide Creation with its God,
And in that moment tasted ecstasy.

Came afterwards the counting of the cost,

The bitterness, the struggle, all the loss
Of love and friendship which he held most dear,
The dismal forecast of the distant years
That rose in visioned anguish on his soul,
Showing him all the lonely coming days,
Dragging their slow length wearily along,
For Aelred still is young. But, never turns he back
From that high price that must perforce be paid
For God's dear love. Aspiring souls who dare
To lift their lips to His in close embrace,
Like Simeon and His Mother, must prepare
To pay the cost in agony or death,
And Brother Aelred thought it not too dear.
What if his bread be bitter to the taste,
His bleeding feet unshod to meet the stones
The future paves for him,—he feels, he knows,
That this one moment's bliss but now enjoyed
Is worth it all, and Heaven can only be
Another such eternally prolonged.

Long, long he kneels all mute and motionless
Before the Lonely One, Who once in woe
Had looked for one to pity and found none;
Who, too, had trod the wine-press all alone,
And tasted desolation's fearful hour
In the lone garden where the bloody drops
Fell in red dew upon the moonlit sward,
Not far from where His own Apostles slept,
Unconscious of their Master's agony.
Oh, by that hour, sweet Saviour, comfort him—
He has no friend in all the world but Thee!

He rose at last, strong in a mighty calm ;
He needs be strong, but not in strength of his.
His soul has tasted joy in bitterness,
And never more will pine for earthly bliss
Nor shrink from pain. Now, all unbound and free,
Naked, he follows close his naked Lord.

When Jesus gives to any human soul
To drink His chalice to the deepest dregs,
So that no single earthly joy is his,
No face of friend to smile on him, no hand
To take his own in trust, no voice to cheer
By one kind word his path, no sunshine save
Those mystic beams that now and then may shine
Upon him from the pale transfigured Face ;
And when that soul in mute contentment lies
Beneath the sacred Foot of his dear Lord,
And only prays still to be trodden on,
Drinking the deep draught of ecstatic pain
From his Lord's chalice with increasing thirst,
Be sure that not much longer will that Foot
Crush down His servant, or that Hand refill
The overflowing cup. Be sure that soon
His tender Voice will call His sufferer home.
And thus it was that in the early spring
Of his strong manhood, Brother Aelred died.
The end was sudden. No disease had shown
Its symptoms to the eyes of those around,
And no one noticed how, from day to day,
He grew more pale and more emaciate.

No single task was ever left undone,
And no complaint fell from his paling lips,
But more and more he smiled and closer pressed
His secret daily burthen to his heart.
One morning, at the early Matin hour,
His place in choir was vacant ; 'twas the first,
The only time since he had entered there.
And ere the bell for Vespers rang 'twas known
That he would never fill that place again.
In his poor cell, around his narrow bed,
The brothers kneel in prayer ; while fear with hope
And grief alternate strive within their hearts
That yearn to hear him ask to be forgiven.
But his pale lips are silent unto them ;
They only move in whispered words of love,
Which now and then they catch, sighed unto Him
Whose Image on the Cross is closely held
By his thin hands against his dying heart.
The sight consoles them, but 'twere meet, they think,
He should confess his fault, and now receive
His brethren's ready pardon ere he die.
Then could they take him to their hearts again,
And mingle consolation with their grief.
But he is silent still !

The door bell rings.

The Abbot wanted in the hall below !
Reluctantly he leaves that dying bed,
To find his nephew, whom he has not seen
Since that unhappy day he brought the gold

Which tempted, thinks the Abbot, his poor child.
His pale face checks the young man's greeting
smile,
And chid the merry word upon his lip.
" What ails thee, uncle, wherefore look so sad ?
May I not share thy grief ?—What dost thou
say ?
Must Brother Aelred die, and he so young,
So promising ? Well, 'tis a gain for Heaven,
For straight he goes there, else God help us all."
Then, smiling sadly at the memory :
" How often have I pictured to myself,
And wished I could have watched unseen his
face
Three years ago, when he found out the trick
I played him on the day I brought the gold.
Thou dost remember, uncle, dost thou not ?
And thou didst guess at once, I know, whose
hand
Had hid it in that old brown cloak of his.—
Art angry, uncle ? Thou dost look so scared.—
I never knew how I escaped his eye,
While I explored that little room of his,
So bare, it made me shiver. And his cloak
So temptingly was laid upon the bed,
Suggesting a meet hiding-place for gold
Within its ancient venerable folds.—
But, uncle, why this trembling ? Art thou ill ?
In pity speak to me ! " But he was gone.

Yes, he was gone—gone quickly to entreat
One word of pardon from those dying lips,

Before they close beyond the power of speech ;
Yes, gone to lay his white hairs in the dust
Beside that humble bed. Alas ! alas !
That he should only gain the room in time
To witness that last dying look of love,
Fixed, not on him,—oh, no ! that raptured gaze
Was for his Crucifix, for that pale Face
From which those faithful wistful eyes had strayed
Never in life. Oh, consummation meet !
That even in that hour the cross should lie
Unlifted on his heart —that he should die
Without the sweet assurance he was cleared,
Without the joy of meeting once again
The love and trust and confidence of old
In those averted eyes around his bed,
Of clasping once again, in faith restored,
Those hands now clasped for him in silent prayer,
But not stretched out to his. 'Twas well, 'twas well.
A blessed thing, to go before his God,
With eyes unmet, with hands ungrasped on earth !
With what a straight and fearless gaze he'll meet
His sacred Eyes, which are the light of Heaven !
With what a strong and tender clasp he'll cling
Unto the wounded Hand held out to him,
In welcome to his everlasting Home !

The Abbot's snowy hairs are bending low,
In grief too deep for tears. His quivering lip

Thrice strives to speak but thrice it strives in vain,
For his sad eyes are resting on the face
Of him whom he had wronged, now calm in death.
Ah ! this was once his well-beloved son,
By him unjustly judged ; and he has died
With lips close seal'd, that now are powerless
To breathe e'en once, once only : " I forgive."
He's gone, and hears not all the loving words
Of sorrow and contrition that have come
Too late to reach him. " Ah, me ! had I but known—
Oh, had I only known one hour ago—
One short, one golden hour ago ! but now ! "—
At last his grief finds language, and his voice
In passionate recital trembles forth
Upon the silence of that room of death,
And, interrupted ever and anon
By stifled sobs around and his own grief
Which overflows the intermittent tale,
He tells the touching story of the dead.
And while, in that poor cell, around the bier,
Where all that's left of Brother Aelred lies,
The monks are sobbing still,—while, on his knees,
The Abbot, with his white head bowed in grief,
In broken humble voice is speaking still,—
Another Voice, a Voice that angels bend
With folded wing and shaded brow to hear,
Falls on the ear of Brother Aelred now :
" Welcome, thou lonely one, unto thy home.

Thou hast, beloved, tasted of My woe,
Taste of My glory now as copiously.
Thou hast been with Me in Gethsemane,
Unsleeping ; thou shalt come to Thabor now.
My dear and faithful servant, enter in,
And take possession of My endless joy ! ”

XII

OUR LADY'S LAST CHRISTMAS

FIFTEEN years had passed since Jesus
Fastened high on Calvary's rood
Gave for us, Eve's sinful children,
Every drop of His Heart's blood.

And the cold earth still bloomed brightly,
All unconscious of that crime,
Brought forth still her flowers in summer,
Autumn fruits and winter rime.

And the Church He died in founding,
Fostered by His Mother's care
Had sprung up in strength and beauty,
Spreading daily everywhere.

She had watched and taught and laboured,
And her task was well-nigh done,
Task of love which had been set her
From the Cross by her dear Son.

In a room within that city
Which the Lord had loved so well,
Where the memories of His presence
Still in every crevice dwell,

Sits the Virgin Mother, gazing
Out upon the radiant sky
As if in its azure seeking
For the glance of Jesus nigh.

Not alone, for there beside her,
With her hand clasped in his own,

Stands the privileged disciple,
Calvary's begotten son.

Time upon her brow so sinless
With his pencil dared not trace
Age's furrows ; still each feature
Bears the bloom of youth's first grace.

List, she speaks in accents gentle,
Turning from her gaze above
Towards that dear beloved disciple
With a mother's look of love :

" Years ago in lowly Nazareth
Yearned my heart to see His face
Till the throes of expectation
To sweet hopes fulfilled gave place.

" But that yearning was but feeble
To that now within my heart
Once again to see my Jesus,
Never more from Him to part.

" And of late He seems to beckon,
And He often whispers : ' Come.'
Oh, methinks I hear His welcome
To the Father's glorious Home !

" Soon, I know, the shadows falling
Will give place to perfect day
And this weary worn spirit
From this earth shall pass away.

" But, oh ! John, beloved treasure !
My Son's dying gift to me !
Let me, ere I go to join Him,
One dear wish confide to thee.

" 'Tis to-day the eve of Christmas,
And my last, I know, on earth ;
Let me spend it in that stable
Where I gave my Christ child birth.

" There too, you, His loved disciple,
By your sacerdotal power,
Once again will bring Him to me
At the holy midnight hour."

And the loved disciple answered,
" Holy Mother, as you will.
I shall go with you to Bethlehem
And your wishes all fulfil."

* * *

While they talked, that very evening,
Ere the day had fully waned,
Lo ! a stranger comes to Bethlehem,
Old and poor and travel-stained.

Slowly through the snow he passes,
Then he stops with anxious gaze
As if seeking for some object
In the dusky evening haze ;

When a sudden gleam of pleasure
Lights his dim and wearied eyes

As despite the falling darkness
A low cavern he espies.

" 'Twas the dream of my long lifetime,"
Then he murmurs with a sigh,
" Once again to see this stable,
On its blessed threshold die."

Hardly had the weary traveller
Reached the cave when tired and worn
He fell down through sheer exhaustion,
Fainting just where Christ was born.

There the old man lay, unconscious
That the evening fall would bring
Her who bore the Child he sought for,
Virgin Mother of the King.

'Twas her form that bending o'er him
On his startled vision broke
Like a sweet dream of his childhood
When to consciousness he woke.

Starting up : " Oh, am I dreaming ?
'Tis the same sweet Mother mild !
Never could this heart forget her,
She who held the Blessed Child."

Then with tears : " O Lady Mother,
On that night so long ago
I was but a little shepherd
Keeping sheep amid the snow

" Then we heard the songs of angels
And we hastened to adore.
Here we saw the great Messiah
Promised us from days of yore.

" And I gave Him my one treasure,
Of the flock the fairest lamb ;
Then He smiled upon me, Lady,
One sweet smile as soft as balm.

" And I ne'er forgot it, Lady,
As in foreign lands I trod,
For its memory ever vivid
Kept me always true to God.

" Lady, now I'm old and weary,
And I wanted just to see
Ere I died that spot so hallowed
Where my God had smiled on me."

Then our Lady sat beside him
And of Jesus gently spoke,
Told His Life and bitter Passion,
How His tender Heart had broke.

Down the old man's cheeks so furrowed
Bitterly the hot tears ran
As he listened to the story
Of God's wondrous love for man.

Now at midnight, at John's summons,
Came the Lord of Heaven to earth ;

Came again the Babe of Bethlehem
To the cave that gave Him birth.

There a First and last Communion
In that lowly shed was made,
As he knelt, the aged shepherd,
To receive the Heavenly Bread.

While God's Mother knelt beside him
With her Babe within her breast,
In a rapture all undreamed of
By the world in its unrest.

Like a second sped the night hours
Whilst these two knelt side by side,
That old shepherd and God's Mother,
God Himself to both allied.

* * *

Morning dawned. Some feeble sunbeams
Lighting up that lowly shed
Showed Our Lady still in rapture,
At her feet the shepherd dead.

Yes, his simple heart had broken
In an ecstasy of joy,
And the old man saw the sweet smile
That had won the shepherd boy.

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